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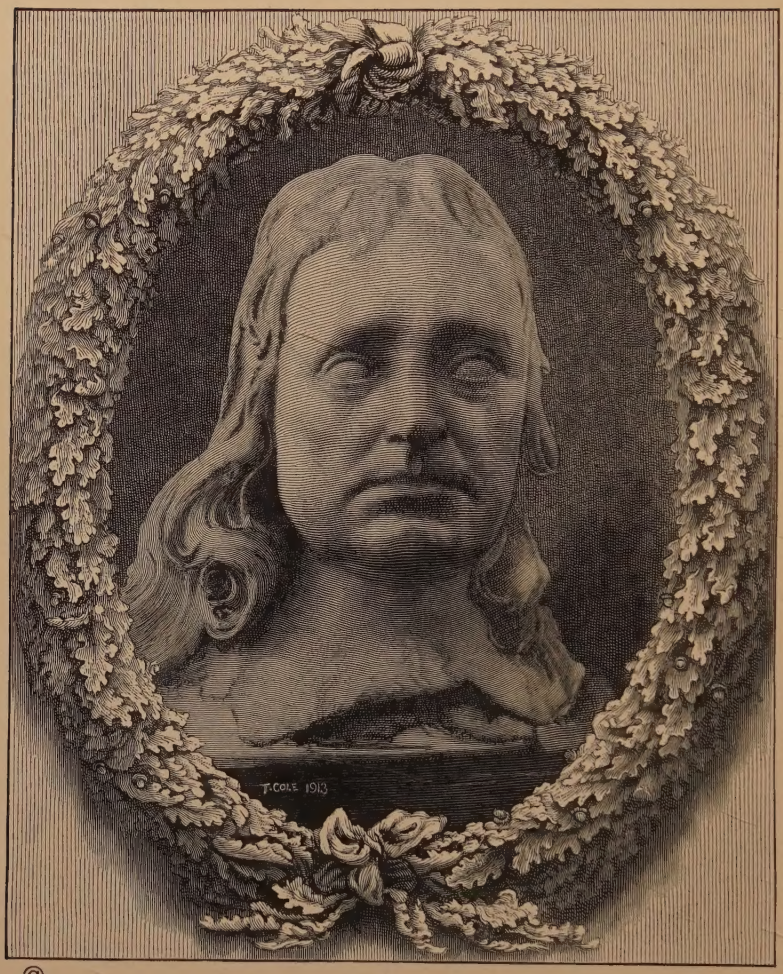

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MILTON

From the bust in clay at Christ's College, Cambridge

ENGRAVED BY TIMOTHY COLE, N.A.

STUDIES IN MILTON
AND
AN ESSAY ON POETRY

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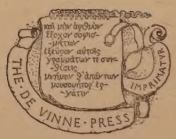

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IN

REVERENCE AND AFFECTION

Dedicated

TO THE MEMORY OF

PROFESSOR FRANCIS JAMES CHILD

OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Engraved on wood by Timothy Cole, N. A., from the bust in clay, at the Master's Lodge, Christ's College, Cambridge, England.

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FROM *LYCIDAS* TO *PARADISE LOST*

FROM *LYCIDAS* TO *PARADISE LOST*

I

THE years of Milton's poetic career fall naturally into three groups: First the glorious decade of his youth, spent at Cambridge and Horton, during which were produced the poems that may be called those of promise, as full of delight as the promise of the morn, beginning with the *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity,* and ending with *Lycidas.* Following this came the twenty years of the middle period, from which sprang the impassioned cantos of his prose, a time of enormous importance to the poet as one of intellectual equipment and gestation, but which at the time was almost barren of poetic result in the form of verse. After this came another decade, or a little more, of magnificent achievement, the fruition of that aspiring purpose which is plainly seen throughout his whole career.

During the twenty years of the middle period Milton wrote no verse except a little sheaf of sonnets in English and Italian. These may well be separated and a part of them disregarded in a serious study of his poetry,

since certain of their number are but the hasty record of transitory moods, so unpoetic sometimes as that of anger or resentment, and are hardly more to the student than literary curiosities. Among the sonnets, however, are those which are of vital importance to any correct understanding of the poet's nature, intimate confessions which spring from the very fountain sources of sincerity.

If Wordsworth could say of the sonnet form: "With this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart,"—with equal fitness may it be affirmed of the Puritan poet. Through this medium more than once has he revealed vital traits of temperament, which we are fortunate indeed to discern. In the sonnets is found the record of his affections; if his loves were discreet, at least were they vital to his happiness, the very nourishment of his soul. The sonnets register as well the pleasant relations which existed between him and the younger men who were always attracted to him, they record his appreciation of several of the leaders of the Parliamentary cause, and they show his connection with public affairs of importance both at home and abroad.

In the verses *To the Nightingale,* usually called the First Sonnet, and composed in the same year as the lines *On Shakespeare,* when Milton was twenty-two years of age, the poet followed the accepted models of the time, and wrote in the vein of Spenser's *Amoretti,* and of the Italian sonnets, with which he was familiar:

> O Nightingale that on yon bloomy spray
> Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still,
> Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,
> While the jolly hours lead on propitious May.

Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,
First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill,
Portend success in love. O, if Jove's will
Have linked that amorous power to thy soft lay,
Now timely sing, ere the rude bird of hate
Foretell my hopeless doom, in some grove nigh;
As thou from year to year hast sung too late
For my relief, yet hadst no reason why.
Whether the Muse or Love call thee his mate,
Both them I serve, and of their train am I.

The poet's slighting reference to the "shallow cuckoo" is in striking contrast, and perfectly in dramatic keeping, with his enthusiastic and oft-repeated praise of the nightingale. The epithet "shallow" is used more than once by him to express contempt. Emerson has recorded in his journal that his clever aunt, toward whom he was under such infinite obligation, once in a mood of expansiveness said to him, "I hate a fool"; and, as nearly as the mild and placid nature of Emerson was capable of harbouring hatred at all, it was exactly this sort of person that most severely tried his patience. Milton took no pains to conceal his contempt for the same individual; he could, and did, hate a fool with all his might. In *Paradise Regained* Christ speaks of one—

"Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself."
(P. R., IV., 327.)

To be shallow, with this man, was to be without the pale; here he could tolerate no compromise, it implied a lack of sincerity; to be wanting in that was to be a candidate for the nethermost pit, and the poet was never one wantonly to deprive the regions thereabout of any part or parcel of their Heaven-appointed host.

Mark Pattison has commented upon Milton's "bloomy spray," reminding us that the flush of colour in the tender branches is apparent at the time when the nightingale first comes in April, before the bursting of the buds, when the circulation of the sap beneath brings a purple glow to the surface of the bark; and he aptly quotes from Arnold's *Thyrsis:*

> Leafless, yet soft as spring,
> The tender purple spray on copse and briar.

The exquisite bloom which this casts over the naked woods seen as a whole, and at a little distance, is as adorable as the blushing of the morn; the time *is* the morning of the year, a season ever dear to the awakened sensibilities of the poet. He is correct in placing the arrival of the nightingale and cuckoo before the leaves are out, but except for these slight touches of exact observation, the sonnet reveals little more of poetic sensibility or exercise of poetic art than a certain facility after Italian models.

In all that made appeal to the ear Milton had a sure and unfailing instinct of appreciation and delight but in his observation of the external universe he was in no sense a naturalist, as Gray, and Cowper, and Wordsworth, and Tennyson perhaps, and Shakespeare, may be said to have been naturalists,—in their poems garnering with delight "the harvest of a quiet eye." Milton loved scenery in its broad effects, and had all of the poet's sensitiveness to the various moods of nature, and to the subtle variants of morning and of evening, and of night; one has but to recall the "opening eyelids of the morn" and a thousand similar expressions to be sure of that,

but he did not excel in the observation of nice details of natural objects. When he speaks of the nightingale it is the passion of the musician and not in the most remote degree that of the ornithologist that is aroused. In contrast with the shallow song of the cuckoo, his reverence for the deep, soul-satisfying quality of the nightingale's song is most evident. His tributes to this bird are genuine and oft repeated, as where, in *Il Penseroso,* he bids Contemplation to summon Silence, her devoted and Heaven-appointed companion,—

> 'Less Philomel will deign a song,
> In her sweetest, saddest plight,
> Smoothing the rugged brow of night;

a charm lying in the very sadness of her melody to dispel care and bring a pensive smile of reverie and delight. The joys of Eden would lack one of their most entrancing accompaniments were the wakeful nightingale to withhold her song,—

> She all night long her amorous descant sung;
> Silence was pleased.
>
> (P. L., IV., 603–4.)

That Silence here again should welcome a voice, however sweet, required no slight degree of magnanimity upon her part, since it is evident that the advent of any sound, be it ever so agreeable, would not merely divide her reign, but quite despoil her of it altogether.

Milton several times plays with the same theme. One recalls the delightful passage where in Eden the gentle Raphael, the "heavenly guest," has been describing the miracle of the creation, and the hymn of praise sung afterwards by the angelic host:

> The Angel ended, and in Adam's ear
> So charming left his voice that he awhile
> Thought him still speaking, still stood fixed to hear;
> Then as new-waked, thus gratefully replied.
> (P. L., VIII., 1–4.)

Adam's love-song to his new-found bride borrows eloquence from reference to the nightingale,—he seems almost to make that bird plead his own passion, and his appeal to his beloved is so contrived in subtlety that it suggests to our ears the actual song of the bird. The arrangement of flute-like vowels in this passage is one of the fine achievements of suggestive description, an imitation of that sound which is associated with the thing described. The verses are a sort of echo of the very notes to which they refer:

> "Why sleep'st thou, Eve? now is the pleasant time,
> The cool, the silent, save where silence yields
> To the night-warbling bird, that now awake
> Tunes sweetest his love-laboured song."
> (P. L., V., 38–41.)

To suggest the word "onomatopœia" in reference to these verses, would be almost as bad as incontinently to throw a stone at the bird whom they describe. Later, in giving an account to the Archangel Michael of these radiant hours of his new awakened life and love, he again pays tribute to the enthralling magic of this song:

> "To the nuptial bower
> I led her blushing like the Morn; all Heaven
> And happy constellations, on that hour
> Shed their selectest influence; the Earth
> Gave sign of gratulation, and each hill;

Joyous the birds; fresh gales and gentle airs
Whispered it to the woods, and from their wings
Flung rose, flung odours from the spicy shrub,
Disporting, till the amorous bird of night
Sung spousal, and bid haste the evening-star
On his hill-top to light the bridal lamp."

(P. L., VIII., 510–20.)

In characteristic mood he delights in the note of sadness,—a sort of pensive gravity being that colour of his mind which shows all the more plainly when warmed by the emotions into a mood of delight:

Sweet bird, that shunn'st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy!
Thee, chauntress, oft the woods among
I woo, to hear thy even-song.

(Il Pen., 61–64.)

He might well have had in mind our own hermit-thrush, in its secret bower of aloofness, when he composed the following lines, so cool does the cadence of the song seem to penetrate the gloom, as if it came from the haunt of the bird, hidden in the remotest heart of some New England grove:

The wakeful bird
Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid
Tunes his nocturnal note.

(P. L., III., 38–40.)

How caressingly the vowels fall upon the ear!

The hermit-thrush of New England and the elusive genius of Hawthorne may not inappropriately be associated in recollection. The author of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* has confided to us

that his literary activities seemed to be aroused only in moods of happiness, and that then, by what might seem a strange contradiction of his nature, the creations of his genius in spite of all that he could do were to a greater or less degree tinged with sadness. Milton could have sympathized with this trait,—one perhaps inherent to the Puritan temperament that loved not the garish light; the summer sky was none the less pleasing that clouds hung about the mountain tops or veiled the brightness of the sun. Others may recall a somewhat similar experience, the clairvoyance that comes in time of sorrow, as if then were opened the fountains of deepest recollection. The lady's call for help in *Comus* has the same colour of sadness and delight:

> Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen
> Within thy airy shell
> By slow Meander's green,
> And in the violet-embroidered vale
> Where the love-lorn nightingale
> Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well.

The verses are poured forth in "full-throated ease," as if it were the song of the bird itself to which we were listening.

The poet never reveals a more convincing mood of sincerity than when he lauds the heavenly traits of "divinest melancholy":

> Pensive nun, devout and pure,
> Sober, steadfast and demure,
> * * * *
> Come, but keep thy wonted state,
> With even step, and musing gait,
> And looks commércing with the skies,
> Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes.
>
> (Il Pen., 31–8.)

Elsewhere he makes Raphael refer to the "solemn nightingale,"* and earlier in the same poem he speaks of—

> [The] silent night,
> With this her solemn bird.
>
> (P. L., IV., 648–9.)

The word "solemn" has become so tainted to our ears by puritanical associations that it is bedeviled out of its original estate of serene dignity and charm; in Milton's verse it had not yet acquired this quality of opprobrium. For instance, in *Lycidas* it seemed natural to the poet to group together, as part of the celestial host, both "solemn troops and sweet societies."

We have the poet's assurance that his own "unpremeditated verse," when he was in the vein of composition, came into his mind without effort on his part, instinctive and exuberant, like the flowing of clear waters in a spring, the sequel of thoughts that "voluntary move harmonious numbers." Yet the way for this facility of utterance and spontaneous expression was carefully prepared beforehand by select reading and by meditation; so he created the mood which was to result in such abundant outpouring of the poetic spirit.

The heavenly Muse came to him at night or in the delicious freshness of the early morn. His life is not spent in a blind man's solitude, he assures us, while the voice divine visitst his slumbers,—

> Or when morn
> Purples the east.
>
> (P. L., VII., 29–30.)

Then all his powers were alert and vigourous.

* P. L., VII., 435.

Aubrey informs us that in summer the poet rose at four o'clock, and began the day by having the Bible read to him in Hebrew; "then," his biographer informs us, "he contemplated." Having conversed with God, he took the time to commune with his own soul, and from this arose refreshed and with his powers concentrated and in the vein for poetic creation. The morning was spent in reading,—of course by means of the eyes of others,—and in dictation, some one always being at hand to take down that which fell from his lips. In the pathetic opening to the Third Book of *Paradise Lost,* where the poet makes reference to his own blindness, he tells us that in spite of his infirmity he wanders nightly in imagination where the Muses haunt, and through the scenes made sacred by the footsteps of Christ,—by "Sion's hill" and "Siloa's brook,"—

> Then feed on thoughts that voluntary move
> Harmonious numbers.
>
> (P. L., III., 37–8.)

What I would wish particularly to call attention to in this passage is the use of the word "voluntary,"—the confession on the poet's part that he deliberately occupies his mind with thoughts which arouse his creative energies, just as the nightingale in order to rally his powers seems first to practise a few notes before bursting into song.*

In *Paradise Regained* the poet's meditations revert to the nightingale that sang in Plato's Academe, a spot

* I remember that an Oxford don once said to me that he was struck by this characteristic and that, moreover, what always impressed him particularly in the song of the nightingale was its quality of distinction; "as if he had studied under the best masters."

dear in associations, and one quick to arouse memories of delight, although his own footsteps had never literally followed those of his master, Plato.* He seems to have heard echoing in his mind the song of the bird itself when he composed the marvellous verse which so happily suggests the very notes that strike the ear as we listen to its rhapsody. It is to be observed that Milton in his retreat at Horton was in the very centre of the nightingale country, the southeastern corner of Buckinghamshire. He has told us that his poetry sprang into his mind as he lay awake at night; then, he says, the verses came without effort, "with a certain impetus and œstro," thanks to

> My celestial patroness, who deigns
> Her nightly visitations unimplored
> And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
> Easy my unpremeditated verse.
>
> (P. L., IX., 21–4.)

And he may well have been listening to the throbbing ecstasy of the nightingale when the verses formed themselves in delightful harmony which refer to

> The olive-grove of Academe,
> Plato's retirement, where the Attic bird
> Trills her thick-warbled notes the summer long.
>
> (P. R., IV., 244–6.)

The thin and flute-like quality of the word "trills" contrasts admirably with the gurgling and "jug-jug"-like sound suggested in "thick-warbling."† Moreover,

* It had been Milton's intention, when in Italy, to visit Greece, but he had felt constrained to cut short his foreign tour, to our deep and lasting deprivation.

† Those who are familiar with the song will, I think, recall the quality of the notes to which reference is made.

"notes" and "long" maintain the clear and sonorous quality of the verse.

The literal and exacting naturalist would give to the male bird sole credit for the nightingale's song, but evidently it seemed to the poet a trait of more complete seduction that this soul-satisfying torrent should pour from female throat; besides, in this he was but following conventional usage, both that of England and of Italy. Soon was his own ear rapturously to respond to the divine ravishment of Leonora's voice in Rome.

The poet's invocation proved fruitless of any immediate result, since he was destined still to remain unmarried for thirteen years, and it had been well then for his peace of mind had the liquid notes not reached his ear, which,

> First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill,
> Portend success in love.

Seven years before, in *Lycidas,* this young scholar, steeped in classical usage, if somewhat inexperienced by actual contact, had invoked the pale ghost of Neæra with her touseled hair, but neither then nor now do we detect the note of passion. He ends properly enough, as a poet is bound to do:

> Whether the Muse or Love call thee his mate,
> Both them I serve, and of their train am I.

Blind, wifeless, and "in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," he threw a thousand times the youthful fire into his praise of Eve when, half a lifetime later, in the youth of his old age, he came to sing her charms.

We find what is lacking in this sonnet, somewhat of

the volume and surge of power which we have come to regard almost as synonymous with the name of Milton, in the ode *On Christ's Nativity,* composed the year before, while the poet was still a student at Cambridge.

II

THE second of Milton's sonnets was written on the occasion of his twenty-third birthday, December 9, 1631, during the last year of his residence at Cambridge, and while he was a candidate for his master's degree:

> How soon hath time, the subtle thief of youth,
> Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!

This "Petrarchian stanza," as he describes it in a letter of very noble tone, was sent to a friend unknown to us, who had tried to persuade Milton to enter the church, and actually to set about doing something in earnest, instead of spending so much time in preparation for he knew not what. In this same letter the poet speaks of his life "as yet obscure and unserviceable to mankind," and there is the implied promise that it shall not always so remain. Then, as ever, he was conscious of his power, only it would seem as if there must sometimes have come into his mind, as afterward into that of Keats, the painful thought lest he should die before he had realized his dream:

> Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
> Before high pilëd books, in charact'ry,
> Hold like rich garners the full-ripened grain.

That reflection may well have given him pause, and warned him against the awful risk of putting off until

the morrow that which only with certainty, if with imperfection, might be accomplished in the passing day. In this same letter to his friend, after referring to the allurements of renown and to the spur of fame, he goes on to say: "Yet that you may see that I am something suspicious of myself, and do take notice of a certain belatedness in me, I am the bolder to send you some of my nightward thoughts some little while ago, because they come in not altogether unfitly, made up in a Petrarchian stanza which I told you of." In this letter also occurs the significant phrase so characteristic of the reverence in which he held the poetic career;—he refers to himself as "not taking thought of being late, so it give advantage to be more fit."

Milton regarded the function of the poet as not so much that of the singer as of the inspired seer. Could Wordsworth's differentiation have been present to his mind, he would doubtless have claimed that his own contribution to the happiness of mankind was to come rather from the "consecration" than from the "poet's dream"; that might well serve to divert the scholarly leisure of his youth, but the appointed task of his manhood was to justify the ways of God to man. Deliberately and before his twenty-third birthday he had formed the determination to write a drama in the manner of the ancients, or else a great epic poem, such as Homer, Dante, and Tasso before him had created, a purpose which he never relinquished; and he had in mind so early as 1640 the general idea of *Paradise Lost*. In that year he recorded the hope that "by labour and intense study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with a strong propensity of nature, I might leave something

so written to after-times, as they should not willingly let it die."

The poet's original idea had been to compose his epic in the Latin tongue, a purpose which, fortunately for us, he afterwards saw fit to abandon. As we study this middle period of his career, with its manifold and very human interests and ties, we realize more clearly how he came to be in closer touch with mankind, and ceased to care for the approvance of scholars alone. It was not altogether from contempt for the ordinary sort of readers that he originally chose Latin as the medium of literary expression, but because the Latin tongue was the universal language used by scholars the world over, and because he wished to reach these not merely in his own country but in Europe at large. Two years before, while in Naples, on the eve of his return to England, he had composed a Latin epistle in verse to the scholar, Manso, and in this had signified his intention of some day writing a poem in the Latin tongue, perhaps on the Arthurian legend: "Perchance I shall call back into verse our native kings, and Arthur stirring wars even under the earth that hides him, or speak of the great-souled heroes, the Knights of the unconquered Table, bound in confederate brotherhood, and (O may the spirit be present to me!) break the Saxon phalanxes under the British Mars."*

The prayer of his youth was that of his more advanced age:

> [Do thou], celestial Light,
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate: there plant eyes; all mist from thence

* Masson's translation.

> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.
> (P. L., III., 51–5.)

It seems an exaggeration of modesty to say, as he does in this sonnet on his twenty-third birthday,—

> My hasting days fly on in full career,
> But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.

Already had he composed the lines *On the Death of a Fair Infant*, written at the age of seventeen, which a discriminating French critic* has pronounced a poem of such importance that it "foretells all the variety of his verse." Besides the production of English poetry before this time, he could show a considerable mass of verse in Latin, which he wrote with equal facility. The consensus of opinion among scholars seems to be that Milton's Latin is very good indeed, but that Landor's is better still. The latter poet, to all intents and purposes so far as Latin composition is concerned, *was* an ancient Roman who happened to be living in a later age, and one that spoke his native tongue with equal grace and fluency. Milton's Latin poetry has the very unexpected quality of real emotion, strongly distinguishing it from almost all other modern verse in that language, and it has the rare distinction of ranking higher as poetry than as Latin, a sort of praise as unlooked for as would be that conferred upon a hairy mastodon for his glossy coat and agile ways, rather than for the majesty of his deportment and venerable antiquity.

* De Montmorency.

There can be little question that the poet's modesty was genuine and unfeigned when he continues:

> And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
> That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.

It would seem as if a youth need not repine who had, two years gone by, written the ode *On Christ's Nativity,* wherein, if ever verse contained the echo of such, are heard celestial harmonies. On his ears fell the majesty and the sweetness of the mystic chants, whose ministrations before God's throne never cease, the worship of his angels,—

> Sons of Light
> * * * * [whose] songs
> And choral symphonies, day without night,
> Circle his throne rejoicing.
>
> (P. L., V., 160–3.)

Together in the Academy of Fine Arts at Venice, hang Titian's *Visitation of St. Elizabeth,* which he began when he was fourteen years of age, and his *Entombment of Christ,* upon which he was at work in his ninety-ninth year,—fitting monuments, marking the beginning and end of that long and crowded life, a life devoted to the service of Religion and of Art. In like manner, it was fitting that Milton's first production above the rank of college exercise, should be this *Hymn on the Morning of the Nativity of Christ,*—

> It was the winter wild,
> While the heaven-born Child,
> All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies,—

the prelude of that career to be closed in solemn grandeur by the *Paradise Regained,* wherein is portrayed the

victory of Christ over Satan, and the declaring of his deity, the story of man proved God, and—

> Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
> By one man's firm obedience fully tried
> Through all temptation.
>
> (P. R., I., 3–5.)

As in properly attuned serenity of mind we read the ode *On the Nativity* we are permitted to share the transport of its creation, and to feel that the music which the young poet invokes in fervent devotion to greet his God, has touched his own sense; his Muse has been permitted to join her voice unto the Angel Choir:

> Ring out, ye crystal spheres!
> Once bless our human ears,
> If ye have power to touch our senses so;
> And let your silver chime
> Move in melodious time;
> And let the bass of heaven's deep organ blow;
> And with your ninefold harmony
> Make up full consort to the angelic symphony.

Well may this song have been the very one sung by the angels of God before the manger where lay the newborn Son.

In the sonnet which we are considering, modesty is shown again, here rather a characteristic of the nation than of the man, when he speaks of his approach to manhood on his twenty-third birthday:

> Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth
> That I to manhood am arrived so near.

In this country perhaps we should regard with somewhat of suspicion the ingenuousness of a bachelor of arts on

his twenty-third birthday who should express any doubt whatever that he had arrived at man's estate. The allusion to his personal appearance reminds one that Milton was distinguished for manly beauty all his life. A Latin epigram written in Naples when he was thirty years of age said of him:

Mind, form, face, grace, and morals are perfect.*

Aubrey says of him later in life: "He was a spare man." "Of middle stature." "His harmonicall and ingeniose soule did lodge in a beautifull and well-proportioned body.

In toto nusquam corpore menda fuit."

"He had a delicate tunable voice, and had good skill. * * * He had an organ in his house, he played on that most. His exercise was chiefly walking." "After dinner he used to walk 3 or 4 hours at a time, (he always had a garden where he lived), went to bed about nine."

Antony Wood has described his appearance at the age of twenty, while he was at Cambridge, when reading a scholastic exercise at Christ's College, as "affable, erect and manly." † At about this same time, by reason of the freshness of his complexion and it may be also from the exuberance of "Hyacinthine locks Round from his parted forelock * * * Clustering," and from his generally youthful appearance, he was known as the "lady of Christ's." The gentle raillery in which this name was conferred was tempered with respect. Nothing better than chaff shows the drift of the wind, and Milton's

* Masson's translation.

† Garnett's *Milton*, 26.

college nickname points at characteristics which were a consistent part of his character. This same man whom Johnson accuses of having had the warmth of temperament of an Eastern lord of the harem, at the start showed certain traits of fastidiousness, if they may be so designated, which were at least sufficiently unusual to distinguish him—so at all events as to attract comment—from the ingenuous youths who were his companions.

In the Sixth Latin Elegy, written after five years' residence at Cambridge, he has given us a glimpse of his quality in an epistle to his faithful Diodati, wherein he confides his conviction that they who would sing of demigods and heroes must content themselves with a beechen bowl, and with what he elsewhere after long lapse of time refers to as "the cool crystálline stream": *

> Their youth should pass in innocence,
> * * * * *
> Pure as the priest, when robed in white he stands,
> The fresh lustration ready in his hands.
> (Cowper's Translation, X., 148.)

Masson says of the passage in which these lines occur,—and certainly if any man knew his Milton it was he,—"They deserve to be learnt by heart with reference to himself, or to be written under his portrait. They give a value to the whole Elegy." † It may be urged that the words just quoted reveal the note of youth, but of a youth how noble! fit source from which to spring the joys of Eden, the sight of delicious Eve in innocence, and "recovered paradise to all mankind." In a similar

* S. A., 546. † *Milton's Poetical Works*, I., 93.

way we have a revelation of his character in this facetious sobriquet, conferred by his companions, of the "lady of Christ's." If a youth destined to accomplish great things is to cherish an ideal, and is to be thought fanatical by those around him in his devotion to it, the fact that the ardour of his early manhood was aroused in praise of chastity shows something in him not to be despised, something millions of miles beyond slothful ease and the primrose path. It need not cause us surprise that the master poet of the Puritans cherished such an ideal.

The critic while passing this phase of his career in review, may at least condone the poet's enthusiasm if he cannot quite bring himself to share it, accrediting it to the purity of his upbringing and to the exaltation of an all-too-rare poetic sensibility. This was no ordinary youth with whom we are dealing; this man was also a spirit, one "finely moved but to fine issues"; why should we not expect something unusual and sublimated in his case? Certainly his preparation had been as little ordinary as one could conceive. We have his own statement, confirmed by the testimony of others, that from the twelfth year of his age he rarely went to bed until midnight, such was his eagerness to prosecute his studies. This life may well have put the seal of scholarship and of a certain sedate gravity on his countenance, through which shone "the tranquil lustre of a lofty mind." This phase of Milton's character in his youth may not be slurred over; it is a vital and inherent trait of his real temperament and disposition.

If one would penetrate to the very secret of the Christian spirit he could not do better than to take to heart

the admonition of St. Paul: "Approving ourselves * * * by pureness, by kindness, by love unfeigned." Not in all of these, by any means, was Milton equally preëminent; others, it may well be, have been more generously endowed with the supreme virtue of "loving-kindness" toward all men, but to no one was it given to respond more vigorously to one of this trinity of perfections than to him from whose soul the motive of *Comus* sprang as an instinctive correlate of beauty.

"Chastity is the flowering of man," Thoreau maintained; and this was exactly the attitude of Milton during the formative period of his poetic life and of his character. He was so constituted that herein there was a "marriage of true minds"; his character and his genius are so inextricably involved that in everything that springs from the fountain of his creative energy both are perfectly apparent. His was not the sort of intelligence that could evolve anything that would not meet with the complete sanction of his reason and of his conscience;—which is only equivalent to saying that he did not primarily possess the dramatic temperament: at all events, it certainly did not possess him.

In 1642, some time before he wrote the sonnet *"When the Assault was intended to the City,"* he felt called upon in a pamphlet* to discuss his own career while at the University. Here we get a glimpse of his real quality in a wonderful and well-known passage: "And long it was not after when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem, that is a composition and pattern of

* *An Apology against a Pamphlet called "A Modest Confutation,"* etc.

the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.

"These reasonings together with a certain niceness of nature, an honest haughtiness and self-esteem, either of what I was or what I might be, which let envy call pride, and lastly that modesty, whereof, though not in the title-page, yet here, I may be excused to make some beseeming profession, all these uniting the supply of their natural aid together, kept me still above those low descents of mind, beneath which he must deject and plunge himself, that can agree to saleable and unlawful prostitutions.

"Next, for hear me out now, readers, that I tell ye whither my younger feet wandered, I betook me among those lofty fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings, and from hence had in renown in all Christendom. There I read it in the oath of every knight, that he should defend to the expense of his best blood, or of his life if it so befell him, the honour and chastity of virgin or matron. From whence even then I learnt what a noble virtue chastity ever must be, to the defence of which so many worthies by such dear adventure of themselves had sworn. And if I found in the story afterwards any of them by word or deed breaking that oath, I judged the same fault of the poet as that which is attributed to Homer to have written undecent things of the gods. Only this my mind gave me, that every free and gentle spirit without that oath ought to be born a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt

spur, or the laying of a sword upon his shoulder, to stir him up both by his counsel and his arm to serve and protect the weakness of any attempted chastity. So that even those books which to many others have been the fuel of wantonness and loose living, I cannot think how unless by divine indulgence, proved to me so many incitements to the love and steadfast observation of virtue."

When this came from Milton's pen he was still a comparatively young man; it is the aspiration of his youth that he has revealed, and from this fountain undefiled sprang the distinction and sustained grandeur of thought and style which are the unfailing and preeminent traits of *Paradise Lost*.* Landor most happily applies to Milton the words of Eve:

> "From thee
> How shall I part, and whither wander down
> Into a lower world?"
>
> (P. L., XI., 281–2.)

In the grand manner, in sublimity of style, none has excelled Milton. To detect the distinction of that verse is the commanding reward of cultivation in letters, to appreciate that and to respond to its appeal. It is offered to our age, almost disregarded, but, like the crystal in the rock, a thousand years impair not the perfection of its purity.

Though in maturity he very clearly distinguished between temperate enjoyment and asceticism,—having lit-

* "It is the aspiration after the pure and noble life, the aspiration which stamps every line he wrote, verse or prose, with a dignity as of an heroic age." Pattison.

tle patience with the latter,—yet during all his life he believed that man's body and spirit were interfused and commingled, and that legitimate delights of the body were the nourishment of the spirit, and by a natural corollary that whatever degraded the body at the same time defiled the spirit. Later in life, when he came to write the *Christian Doctrine*, he carried the idea of the inextricable partnership of mind and matter to its logical conclusion, accepting literally the resurrection of the body, and declaring his belief in the suspended animation after death of body and soul alike until the trump of the Last Judgment shall have aroused them. The spirit was the vital and illuminating principle of the body, as was the light of the sun.*

Well may such a youth, without any mental reservation whatever, have acted upon the belief that his body was the temple of God. We shall see that his more mature judgment and evolution of belief demanded equal reverence for both; neither could be treated with contumely; both were created by God; and since each of them shared in the well-being and in the suffering of the other, they were mutually joined for better or for worse, and were to be separated not even by death. It was a marriage making them one flesh, one spirit.

If then in his present mood he believed that the spirit of God dwelt within him, he may well have regarded any physical degradation, or what might be so conceived by him, as a dimming of the light which is its essence. To

* Compare this passage in Satan's apostrophe to the orb of day:

"Thou Sun, of this great world both eye and soul."
(P. L., V., 171.)

Milton in his youth the words of Raphael might as fittingly have been addressed as to the new-created Adam:

> "God on thee
> Abundantly his gifts hath also poured,
> Inward and outward both, his image fair:
> Speaking or mute, all comeliness and grace
> Attends thee, and each word, each motion, forms."
> (P. L., VIII., 219–23.)

To no man of our race could this great Angel more fittingly have said:

> "Nor less think we in Heaven of thee on Earth
> Than of our fellow-servant. * *
> For God, we see, hath honoured thee."
> (P. L., VIII., 224–28.)

And no slight part of Milton's strength lay in this very fact that he too believed that God had honoured him; and in the conviction of that belief he regulated his life.

The passage quoted from the Sixth Elegy expressed not merely a mood of adolescence, later to evaporate and disappear. When he was about to begin the composition of *Paradise Lost* he invoked Urania in similar vein:

> And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
> Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
> Instruct me, for thou know'st; * *
> * * what in me is dark
> Illumine, what is low raise and support.*
> (P. L., I., 17–23.)

Can there be question that the aspiration of the last six lines of the sonnet was in serious earnest? The

* "That the Spirit enlightens the mind within, in this belief the Puritan saint, the poet, and the prophet, who all met in Milton, were at one." Pattison, *Milton*, 188.

verses have the solemnity of a prayer, and express the feeling which guided his whole life:

> Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure even
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which Time leads me and the will of Heaven;
> All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great Task Master's eye.

Long afterwards, blind, defeated, and in distress, he could write in the same serenity of mind:

> "Nor love thy life, nor hate; but what thou liv'st
> Live well; how long or short permit to Heaven."
> (P. L., XI., 553–4.)

III

THE ode *On the Nativity of Christ,* the verses *On Shakespeare,* the First and Second Sonnets, were written while Milton was still a student at Cambridge. Fortunately his father's means, whose profession as a scrivener, combining the functions of lawyer and legal stationer, was a moderately lucrative one, opening the way for wise investment, made a fellowship unnecessary for him; and after leaving the University he spent six years at Horton in study and writing.* These have been called

* "In this delicious retirement of Horton, in alternate communion with nature and with books, for five years of persevering study he laid in a stock, not of learning, but of what is far above learning, of wide and accurate knowledge. Of the man whose profession is learning, it is characteristic that knowledge is its own end, and research its own reward. To Milton all knowledge, all life, virtue itself, was already only a means to a further end. He will know only that which is of use to know, and by useful, he meant that which conduced to form him for his vocation of poet." "All he reads, sees, hears, is to him but nutriment for the soul." Mark Pattison, *Milton,* 15, 27.

the years of preparation, but they were, as well, years of generous production, during which were composed *Comus, L'Allegro, Il Penseroso* and *Lycidas.* Milton has borne testimony to his father's aid and generosity more than once; for instance in the Latin poem addressed to him, written soon after leaving Cambridge, at a time when, it may be somewhat to his father's grief, he had formed the determination not to enter the church, but to devote his life to poesy:

> Thou hatest not the gentle Muse,
> My Father! for thou never bad'st me tread
> The beaten path, and broad, that leads right on
> To opulence, nor didst condemn thy son
> To the insipid clamours of the bar,
> To laws voluminous, and ill observed;
> But, wishing to enrich me more, to fill
> My mind with treasure, led'st me far away
> From city din to deep retreats, to banks
> And streams Aonian, and, with free consent,
> Didst place me happy at Apollo's side.
>
> (*Ad Patrem,* COWPER'S TRANSLATION.)

The poet goes on to say that after he had mastered Latin and Greek, it was by his father's encouragement that he had learned French, Italian and Hebrew; the latter wished him also to be conversant with Natural Science, and, in short, would have had him, like Bacon, accept all learning as his province. His bringing up was that of one consecrated to a high calling, to an appointed task. The poet himself never doubted this. In a lesser man such a belief would simply have amounted to ridiculous presumption; only as it became justified by the event,—or, rather, as the event showed its foundation

to be laid in modesty rather than in overweening conceit,—did it assume a character of simple dignity. Under a thin disguise in *Paradise Regained,* the poet, then nearing the end of his career, confesses, in the words of Christ, his own early attitude of mind:

> "When I was yet a child, no childish play
> To me was pleasing; all my mind was set
> Serious to learn and know, and thence to do,
> What might be public good; myself I thought
> Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
> All righteous things."
>
> (P. R., I., 200–6.)

"The voice is Jacob's voice!"

The poet had received careful instruction in music from his father John Milton, who was a devotee to the art, and was himself a composer whose work was known and appreciated in his day. Various madrigals which he had set to music were published in the *Triumphs of Oriana,* contributed by several poets and musicians in honour of Queen Elizabeth; and we have the statement of the poet's nephew that when the Palatine of Sirodia, a Polish prince, visited Oxford in 1583, the elder Milton had composed a musical celebration in forty parts in honour of the guest. Philips records that this Polish nobleman had the grace to present to him a gold chain in recognition of his skill.* But his greatest achievement in music, although he was not at the time aware of its full significance, was that he taught his son while still a lad to sing, and later to play upon the organ. The poet

* "He was an ingeniose man, delighted in musique, composed many songs now in print, especially that of Oriana, and got a plentifull estate by it, and left off many years before he dyed." Aubrey, it is not improbable, somewhat exaggerates his proficiency.

pays a tribute to his father's musical genius in the same Latin poem from which we have quoted:

> Nor thou persist, I pray thee, still to slight
> The sacred Nine, and to imagine vain
> And useless, Powers, by whom inspired, thyself
> Art skilful to associate verse with airs
> Harmonious, and to give the human voice
> A thousand modulations, heir by right
> Indisputable of Arion's fame.
> Now say, what wonder is it, if a son
> Of thine delight in verse, if so conjoin'd
> In close affinity, we sympathize
> In social arts, and kindred studies sweet?
> Such distribution of himself to us
> Was Phoebus' choice; thou hast thy gift, and I
> Mine also, and between us we receive,
> Father and son, the whole inspiring God.
>
> (*Ad Patrem,* COWPER'S TRANSLATION.)

The relation between these two was most cordial. We have confirmatory evidence, if it were needed, that this precocious boy was the apple of his father's eye, in the circumstance that he ordered a portrait painted of him by Cornelis Janssens, when the lad was ten years of age. The Janssens of Amsterdam were makers of musical instruments, so it is not unlikely that the painter, who was a young man of twenty-four or -five when the portrait was painted, came to the elder Milton with letters of introduction, the father being a musician and therefore naturally interested in the instruments which came from this Dutch atelier.* It depicts a sturdy lad,

* *Portraits of Milton,* by George C. Williamson, Litt.D., 1908. The portrait to which reference is made is now in the possession of Mr. J. Passmore-Edwards, England.

with a head massive for one of his years, and with a countenance where one may detect a modest look of determination. He is handsomely but rather plainly dressed, as befitted the son of a Puritan and of one in his father's profession. If the latter had wished to follow the advice of Polonius, this is exactly the sort of coat he would have chosen for him: "rich not gaudy, not expressed in fancy." His father's occupation as scrivener was largely concerned with the preparation of deeds, a position of trust and responsibility, and the home became one of ease and refinement. The father was not a great musician but he loved music, he was not a poet although he wrote verses; what is of paramount importance to us is that he had the insight to recognize his son's extraordinary endowment, and did everything in his power to bring it to perfection. He spared him the drudgery of earning his own living during those years at Horton and throughout the third decade of his life, and carefully nourished his genius during his residence at home. What an exquisite gratification it must have been for the father to welcome the poems of this period as fruit of the Muses' cultivation made possible by his own fostering care! What delight in the whole broad world could have rendered the same satisfaction as this? Music and poetry were occupations of very vital import in this Puritan household.

IV

MILTON went abroad for travel in April, 1638, and was absent from home, chiefly in Italy, a year and three months; he was then in the thirtieth year of his age.

Philips informs us that his uncle "put himself into an equipage suitable to his design, * * * and set out for Paris, accompanied by only one man, who attended him through all his travels."

Italian he had studied before this, and he naturally read the literature of the country while there; he even mastered the language sufficiently to use it in the sonnets written in Italy, but for this, if we accept his own statement literally, he had an all-sufficient motive. In the canzone he has given the reason for choosing this medium of expression. Strutt renders the passage freely, but with liquid flow:

> The nymphs and amorous youths around,
> Deride my lyre's unskilful sound.
> "And why," they ask, "O why this care,
> In accents strange to tell thy pains,
> Breathing soft love in unknown strains?
> Confess thy hopes are vain, though fair,
> That whisper, 'Sweeter sounds may dwell
> In music of a foreign shell.'"
>
> * * * * *
>
> My gentle verse, O smoothly flow,
> And tell the fair for whom I rove,
> "This language is the choice of love."

To this thought he gives a fuller expression in the Fourth Sonnet:

> As in the twilight brown, on hillside bare,
> Useth to go the little shepherd maid,
> Watering some strange fair plant, poorly displayed,
> Not thriving in unwonted soil and air,
> Far from its native springtime's genial care;
> So on my ready tongue hath love assayed
> Of a strange speech to wake new flower and blade.
>
> (MacDonald's Translation.)

Five Italian sonnets and a single canzone were one result of his foreign tour:

> Love willed it so, and I, at others' cost,
> Already knew Love never willed in vain.
> (Sonnet IV., MacDonald's Translation.)

Perhaps these were little more than the academic exercises of one who was perfecting himself in the use of a language with which he was not quite familiar, and it may be that the reason which he gives is merely the conventional usage of poets; perhaps it was to a certain degree both. We have, apart from these sonnets, his own confession, in a letter to Diodati, of the effect that this "new type" of beauty produced upon him, accustomed all his life to the quite different charm and rosy freshness of English women, when he speaks of his "soul tremulous with emotion" by reason of the loveliness which he beheld:*

> Yet think me not thus dazzled by the flow
> Of golden locks, or damask cheek; more rare
> The heart-felt beauties of my foreign fair,
> A mien majestic, with dark brows that show
> The tranquil lustre of a lofty mind.
> (Sonnet V., Cowper's Translation.)†

* Exactly this same phrase is found in the *Defensio Secunda:* "But the pudicity of his behaviour and language covers a soul tremulous with emotion." Pattison, *Milton's Sonnets,* 102.

† Cowper's translation is a pleasant one, yet has he in the last lines added a moral grace which is quite his own; what Milton literally said was,—

> A presence lofty and modest, and in the eye-brows
> The calm splendour of a lovely black.
> (Pattison's Translation.)

Compare the following from Spenser; in which he says of Belphœbe that—

> Upon her eyelids many graces sate,
> Under the shadow of her even brows.

The poet had given somewhat of serious thought to the same "golden locks" to which he here refers. In the First Elegy, addressed to Diodati, he made record of a certain agitation in the presence of "love's golden snare," * and long before this he had written of

> Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the morn.
> (Comus, 753.)

The sonnets to which we are referring express not merely the praises of physical perfection in her to whom they are addressed, but praises as well of her "gentle spirit," of her "graciously lofty"

> Spirit sweetly displaying itself,
> Of winning deeds never sparing,
> And of those gifts which are the arrows and the bow of love,
> In that region where thy high virtue flowers.
> (Sonnet III., PATTISON'S TRANSLATION.)

He makes mention of his lady's voice more than once:

> O when those lips in speech so matchless move
> Or frame the song that bids the forest bend;
> Be all aware who fear, alas! to love,
> And from the enchantress every sense defend:
> Reason can only save, ere yet desire
> With amorous flame the inmost bosom fire.
> (Sonnet III., STRUTT'S TRANSLATION.)

And again "from her lips" comes

> Song whose sweet control
> Down from her sphere the labouring moon might bow.
> (Sonnet V., STRUTT'S TRANSLATION.)

* Cowper's translation; Pattison gives us: "Golden nets of hair":

> Tremulosque capillos
> Aurea quae fallax retia tendit Amor.
> (Elegia Prima, 59–60.)

Milton spent time and money to satisfy his eager love for music; it was one of his dearest delights. The single extravagance which he allowed himself while abroad was the purchase of a collection of choice music. He has told us that from Venice he sent home a chestful of the best to be procured, a treasury of enjoyment which was to yield him happiness as long as he lived.

It is true that the poet is often moved to eloquence by visions of beauty which appeal to the eye, but his most convincing expressions of satisfaction are reserved for the raptures which are received through the medium of the ear. Even the splendours of Paradise are most effectively brought before his inward eyes by the ecstasies of sound. The scholarly recluse would find delight beneath "the high embowerèd roof" of abbey or cathedral:

> There let the pealing organ blow,
> To the full-voiced choir below,
> In service high and anthems clear,
> As may with sweetness through mine ear,
> Dissolve me into ecstacies,
> And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.
>
> (Il Pen., 161–6.)

In *Paradise Lost* he dwells over and over again upon the inspiration to be derived from music, and in its praise his poetic genius is always aroused; indeed the rhythm and roll of verse in that poem are in themselves no inconsiderable part of the master achievement of it all. Only to one who possessed an ear most sensitive to pleasing combinations of sound in infinite variety were possible the achievements of musical cadence and modulation,

the reverberations of mighty phrase, which are found in that poem:

The surge and thunder of the Odyssey.

When he was writing *Paradise Lost,* Milton spent a portion of every day at the organ; it was his never-failing solace and inspiration; from it, as from a pure fountain of delight, he drew constant refreshment and power; with its notes was his mind in uninterrupted accord. The full tones and ponderous sweep of harmonious sound in *Paradise Lost* are not less a triumph of art than the meaning of the words to which that music is the accompaniment, or the majestic imagery that adorns the poem, or the grand and perfect design to which all its parts and qualities are subservient; in each is apparent an even and sustained magnificence of style.*

Besides spending an hour at the organ every day, Milton often played upon the bass viol, while his wife sang for him. Her voice was sweet but it is not strange that to his sensitive and accurate ear it should sometimes seem not altogether faultless; there may be degrees of excellence in melody,—harmony to a correct ear can be only good or bad.

V

In regard to the kindred arts of painting and sculpture, the same knowledge and perspicacity cannot be claimed for the poet; in these he was comparatively

* "After I have been reading *Paradise Lost,* I can take up no other poet with satisfaction. I seem to have left the music of Handel for the music of the streets, or at the best for drums and fifes." Landor, *Southey and Milton; Imaginary Conversations,* IV., 47.

uninstructed, even perhaps somewhat lacking, strange as it may seem, in the power of appreciation. Although he must have seen many times both in Rome and Florence the masterpieces of painting of the Italian Renaissance, he refers to them only once, and then but casually; they seem to have left him unmoved, and it is not easy to determine how far afterwards in his own creative activity he was influenced by the impression which at the time they must have produced upon his mind.

In *Paradise Lost* his genius is aroused by a great variety of different interests, sometimes even by a bald list of geographical names, but neither there nor in his prose do we detect a single passage that refers to the creations of Michael Angelo, as might well have been the case, in a manner similar to that in which he makes reference to "the Tuscan artist," Galileo.*

We have no specific record that he visited the Sistine Chapel, though we know that he spent part of four months in Rome in 1638–9, in daily contact with men of intelligence and cultivation, studying the monuments and antiquities of that city. He was not the man to do this in a dilettante and cursory manner; in all human probability he saw the best of them not only once but many times, and so far as he was at all impressionable to the creations of the painter's art these must have influenced him. In a letter to Lucas Holste, the secretary to one of the Cardinals Barberini, written after his return to England, he speaks of aid given him to examine the treasures of the Vatican Museum, particularly various precious books of Greek manuscripts. If any

* P. L., I., 288–91. He refers to Galileo again in P. L., V., 261–3; and in P. L., VIII., 5–178, he gives a general dissertation on astronomy.

pictures in the world could have stirred a man of his temperament and power, Michael Angelo's frescoes must have done so with peculiar force. In the "great gigantic angels" of *Paradise Lost,* and in the portrayal of what happened in Heaven and Hell, we have presented to our imagination scenes over which Michael Angelo brooded long and to good purpose. When afterwards, in blindness, the poet came to describe the people of his celestial city, it would seem as if Michael Angelo's pictures, whether or not he remembered them in detail, must inevitably have been more or less vividly present to his recollection. The titanic strength of Michael Angelo bore close resemblance to his own endowment; the genius of the two men was in some respects almost identical. The personages portrayed in the frescoes, as they sprang, instinct with life, from the sculptor-painter's hand, were possessed of an elevation of mind similar to that of the poet's, and reflected a kind of austerity, which the two men without question shared in common.

If any product of the human intellect is characterized by the grand manner, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel may claim that distinction; it was this ceiling that made Raphael thank God that he had not lived before the time of Michael Angelo. From that panel of the series, perhaps the finest of all, which presents the *Creation of Adam,* Milton may well have derived his first visual conception of the dignity, the vitality, and the reserve energy of his own Adam, an embodiment of calm reason and flawless physical power. By the figure of Christ the Avenger, in the *Last Judgment,* we feel that undoubtedly Milton was deeply impressed,—more deeply

perhaps than he himself realized, so that the poet has given us in verse what is almost a presentation of the same figure expressed by Michael Angelo in visible form,—the arm uplifted in denunciation, "and sword upon [his] puissant thigh," stern, relentless and inexorable; the very embodiment of that awful and relentless word: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." In the work of no other painter that the world has seen have we so nearly an image of the Son of God as Milton conceived him. It is more than a coincidence; when Milton came to present to us the figure of Christ, what he has given is but the rendering in verse of that which had before appealed to the physical eye. In *Paradise Lost,* on the day when the Divine Son was begotten, the Almighty thus addresses the heavenly host summoned to listen to his edict:

> "Hear, all ye Angels, progeny of light,
> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,
> Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand!
> This day I have begot whom I declare
> My only Son, and on this holy hill
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand; your head I him appoint,
> And by myself have sworn, to him shall bow
> All knees in Heaven, and shall confess him Lord.
> Under his great vicegerent reign abide
> United, as one individual soul,
> Forever happy. Him who disobeys
> Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day,
> Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
> Into utter darkness deep ingulfed, his place
> Ordained without redemption, without end."
>
> (P. L., V., 600–15.)

When God addresses the new-created Son, he emphasizes the fact of his own transmitted power, of his reflected glory and might:

> "Son, thou in whom my glory I behold
> In full resplendence, Heir of all my might."
> (P. L., V., 719–20.)

The meekness and mercy and long-suffering of the Redeemer are not by any means the traits which the poet has in mind to bring out in strongest relief; we have the vital note of the Miltonic Christ in the pregnant words, addressed to the Almighty:

> "Whom thou hat'st I hate, and can put on
> Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on."
> (P. L., VI., 734–5.)

After God has confided to the Son that it concerns them both closely "to be sure of [their] omnipotence," the latter announces his own point of view, in a mood not dissimilar to that of the satirical sonnets, which reveal the poet in his least amiable mood:

> "Mighty Father, thou thy foes
> Justly hast in derision, and secure
> Laugh'st at their vain designs and tumults vain,
> Matter to me of glory, whom their hate
> Illustrates, when they see all regal power
> Given me to quell their pride, and in event
> Know whether I be dextrous to subdue
> Thy rebels, or be found the worst in Heaven."
> (P. L., V., 735–42.)

The same sternness of Jehovah, communicated to the Son, and reflected by him, is maintained as the drama unfolds; the Almighty says

"But whom send I to judge them? whom but thee,
Vicegerent Son? to thee I have transferred
All judgment, whether in Heaven, or Earth, or Hell."
(P. L., X., 55–7.)

This is precisely Michael Angelo's conception of Christ in the *Last Judgment*, and the poet may well have stored in memory the image of the relentless Judge with threatening arm, the symbol of divine retribution, "gloomy as night." There is no taint of effeminacy in Milton's picture of the Messiah in the Sixth Book of *Paradise Lost*. The angels under Lucifer had been temporarily successful against the forces of the Archangel Michael:

"They among themselves in pleasant vein
Stood scoffing, heightened in their thoughts beyond
All doubts of victory."
(P. L., VI., 628–30.)

Soon were they to learn what signifies the wrath of God:

"Whence to his Son,
The assessor * of his throne, he thus began:
* * * * *
'Effulgence of my glory, Son beloved,
Son in whose face invisible is beheld
Visibly, what by Deity I am,
And in whose hand what by decree I do,
Second Omnipotence! * * *
* * Into thee such virtue and grace
Immense I have transfused, that all may know
In Heaven and Hell thy power above compare;
* * * * *
Go, then, thou Mightiest, in thy Father's might;
Ascend my chariot, guide the rapid wheels

* "Assessor" is one who sits with a judge, an assistant.

That shake Heaven's basis; bring forth all my war,
My bow and thunder, my almighty arms
Gird on, and sword upon thy puissant thigh;
Pursue these Sons of Darkness, drive them out
From all Heaven's bounds into the utter Deep;
There let them learn, as likes them, to despise
God and Messiah his anointed King.'

* * * * *

Thus the Filial Godhead answering spake:

* * * * *

'Whom thou hat'st I hate, and can put on
Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on,
Image of thee in all things; and shall soon,
Armed with thy might, rid Heaven of these rebelled,

* * * * *

That from thy just obedience could revolt,
Whom to obey is happiness entire.' "

(P. L., VI., 678–741.)

Milton loved Liberty, but was in no sense a democrat; he had slight sympathy with those who would have men governed by concession, or ruled alone by meek appeal to their reason, contemning all superior authority, even of God on his throne. By temperament and by virtue of his extraordinary intellectual endowment, of which he must have been perfectly aware, he was intellectually an aristocrat of the aristocrats.

To that inner eye, before which were summoned in the poet's blindness the innumerable visual images stored with such accuracy in his retentive brain, the immutable and priceless records of his youth, may well have appeared the *dramatis personæ* of the *Last Judgment* of Michael Angelo, when the following lines of *Paradise Lost* formed themselves in his mind;—the words are those of the Almighty to the Son:

"All knees to thee shall bow. * *
When thou * * * *
Shalt in the sky appear, and from thee send
The summoning Archangels to proclaim
Thy dread tribunal; forthwith from all winds
The living, and forthwith the cited dead
Of all past ages, to the general doom
Shall hasten: * * * *
Then, all thy Saints assembled, thou shalt judge
Bad men and Angels; they arraigned shall sink
Beneath thy sentence."

(P. L., III., 321–32.)

This is exactly as Michael Angelo depicts them; the turbulent fall of the condemned, dragged down in torment. Milton is describing the very scene which he had beheld in the frescoes of the Vatican. How could he forget them? It transcends belief.

Without doubt the mighty panorama of the Sistine Chapel made a permanent impression upon the poet's mind; and we may rest assured that in his blindness he not only summoned again before his inward eye the scenic presentation of the *Last Judgment,* which he had himself beheld, but we may feel equally confident that to his imagination the personages of that scene moved and breathed and formed themselves in thousandfold variants of Michael Angelo's conception.

Our age has drifted far from the vivid realization of God's awfulness and the severity of the divine Son; no longer do the terrors of the Judgment and of Hell hold us dumb and paralyzed. A more effeminate age has merged into the character of the Son that of his Virgin Mother; it suits our time, so far as it is mildly occupied with these themes at all, to brood over the

mercy of Christ, his traits of gentleness and tender loving-kindness, to the exclusion of his other and more stern attributes as conceived by an age which took them *au grand sérieux,* with no taint whatever of mental reservation. Milton's admiration was of a more virile sort; to him the power of a stern and relentless judge seemed the dominating characteristic of the Son of God. The poet's attitude is all the more striking since, as Professor Verity points out, the overthrow of the rebels is assigned in the Book of *Revelation* not to Christ at all but to the Archangel Michael. (Rev. xii., 7–12.)

In that panel of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel which portrays the *Temptation,* the painter was successful as in no other figure of all those to which his fertile imagination gave existence in presenting the type of a young and beautiful woman,—

> With native honour clad,
> In naked majesty.
>
> (P. L., IV., 289–90.)

The various types of noble women which the sculptor rendered in marble are of a different sort altogether from this presentation of Eve, which is more pleasantly pagan,—dignified and majestic without losing feminine charm. The Madonnas of the sculptor are of a sort so noble that they are lifted quite above the perfectly legitimate allurements of sense. Both Michael Angelo and Milton were without doubt sensitive to the power which every strong and normal woman may exercise over man without sacrificing in the least her dignity or the serenity of her womanly estate; each of these men in a different way responded vigorously to such appeal.

When it came to the presentation of the Creator, Milton's method was radically different from that of Michael Angelo, and he has wisely left the portrayal of that personage to the imagination; the Almighty is not actually presented to us but remains unseen, "concealed by excess of light."

In Michael Angelo's representation of the creation it is to be noted that, differently from Milton, it is God and not Christ who instils the breath of life into inanimate man, but although the poet intrusts the work of creation to the Son, Milton only slightly differs from Michael Angelo in this, since he has both the Father and the Son present at the creation of man:

> "Therefore the omnipotent
> Eternal Father (for where is not he
> Present?) thus to his Son audibly spake:
> " 'Let us now make Man in our image, Man
> In our similitude.' "
>
> (P. L., VII., 516–20.)

VI

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR has an inspired passage in which he says of Milton: "It may be doubted whether the Creator ever created one altogether so great; taking into our view at once (as much indeed as can at once be taken into it) his manly virtues, his superhuman genius, his zeal for truth, for true piety, true freedom, his eloquence in displaying it, his contempt of personal power, his glory and exaltation in his country's." Such, in Landor's opinion, this young scholar was afterwards to prove himself, whom we now see writing love sonnets in Italian to an unknown beauty, or exercising himself

in Italian verse after well-accepted models. Bearing in mind the Milton that was to be, had ever woman laid at her feet more precious offering than this from him:

> Lady, to thee my heart's poor gift would I
> Offer devoutly; and by trial sure
> I know it faithful, fearless, constant, pure,
> In its conceptions graceful, good, and high.
> When the world roars, and flames the startled sky,
> In its own adamant it stands secure,
> As free from chance and malice ever found,
> And fears and hopes that vulgar minds confuse
> And loyal to each manly thing,
> As it is to the sounding lyre and to the muse.
>
> (Sonnet VII., MASSON'S TRANSLATION.)

While Milton was in Rome he dedicated three Latin epigrams to the singer Leonora Baroni, but we have no reason to believe that the Italian sonnets, although it has been so asserted, were addressed to the same person. Her portrait has come down to us, and reveals intelligence; it is not strange, however, that in transmission through the medium of the engraver's art, much of her personal attractiveness has evaporated.* All accounts are united that she possessed a voice of great charm; she was the daughter of one who had in her time been herself a famous beauty, and was twenty-two years old when Milton listened enraptured to her song, perhaps at a concert at the Barberini Palace.†

* The portrait may be seen in Ademollo's monograph on Leonora Baroni, *La Leonora di Milton e di Clementi IX.*, A. Ademollo. (No date.)

† It was not hard for her to find a protector in Rome; she was the favourite of Cardinal Rospigliosi, and for a considerable time afterwards basked in pontifical favour when that dignitary was elevated to the Papal See as Clement IX.

Having in his mind to bestow praise, Milton did not hesitate to give it

The first of the epigrams, *Ad Leonoram Romae Canentem,* may be thus rendered:

> A wingëd angel from the ethereal ranks
> In popular belief guards each man's course;
> What wonder, Leonora, if to thee
> There fall a greater honour, for thy voice
> Proclaims God present in thee. Either God
> Or some bright spirit elect from heavenly choir
> Sings unseen through thy throat, creative sings,
> And teaches easily that mortal hearts
> Accustom may themselves to immortal sounds.
> But if God be all things, through all diffused,
> In thee alone he speaks, all else inhabits mute.

The conception of a guardian angel, accompanying us from birth to death, stayed with the poet to the end; in the *Agonistes* the Chorus dismisses Samson:

> "Go, and the Holy One
> Of Israel * *
> Send thee the Angel of thy birth, to stand
> Fast by thy side."
>
> (S. A., 1427–32.)

The central idea of the epigram, that some higher power found utterance through her song, was little more than a rendering into Latin of that which he had previously expressed in *Comus:*

> *Comus.* Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould
> Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?
> Sure something holy lodges in that breast,

with a lavish hand,—so generously, in fact, that to the gentle Cowper the little poem apparently seemed impious, and he has left it out altogether, though translating the other two epigrams; only deigning to inform us that "they appear to me far superior to what I have omitted."

> And with these raptures moves the vocal air
> To testify his hidden residence.*
>
> (Comus, 244–8.)

Milton had theories of his own about unseen spirits which surround us all our days, conceptions whose origin was not to be found in the Bible. In those wonderful lines in *Comus,*—hissing like a serpent,—which as we read them give an instinctive thrill, not exactly of fear but of surprise and apprehension as from contact with the unknown and supernatural,—he speaks of

> Airy tongues that syllable men's names,
> On sands and shores and desert wildernesses;†
>
> (Comus, 208–9.)

and again, in *Paradise Lost,* when Adam is expounding to Eve the utility of beauty (the converse of the sentiment that "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen"), he says of the stars,—

> "These, then, though unbeheld in deep of night,
> Shine not in vain. Nor think, though men were none,
> That Heaven would want spectators, God want praise.
> Millions of spiritual creatures walk the Earth
> Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep:
> All these with ceaseless praise his works behold,
> Both day and night. How often, from the steep
> Of echoing hill or thicket, have we heard
> Celestial voices to the midnight air,

* In terms of pagan mythology, he had given expression to almost the same idea in the Latin epistle to his father which has already been quoted. *Ante,* p. 32.

† Compare the following from Keats:

> Strange ministrant of undescribed sounds,
> That come a swooning over hollow grounds,
> And wither drearily on barren moors.
>
> (Endymion, I., 285–7.)

Sole, or responsive each to other's note,
Singing their great Creator! Oft in bands
While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,
With heavenly touch of instrumental sounds
In full harmonic number joined, their songs
Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to Heaven."
(P. L., IV., 674–88.)

That Milton should give credence to these unseen denizens of the air is an imaginative contribution of his own to the accepted mythology of his time. It is a curious note of harmony on his part with mystics like Blake or Swedenborg of a later period, between whom and himself there is as a rule little in common. Ordinarily Milton was content to accept literally the word of Scripture with slight regard for the gloss of any commentator, whatever the weight of his authority, even if it were Chrysostom or Jerome; but here exuberant fancy swept him quite off his feet.

The Italian sonnets and canzone were inspired by admiration for the new sort of beauty which he saw in Bologna; whether any one particular woman was responsible for his youthful enthusiasm, we may not know. In the Third Sonnet he speaks of

L'erbosa val di Reno e il nobil varco;

which makes the reference to Bologna assured, since that city, if not literally on the banks, is in the vale of the winding Reno. It is quite possible that his rhapsodies were only a tribute to this brilliant new sort of beauty, for, as we have seen, he had confided to Diodati that "his soul was tremulous with emotion by reason of the beauty which it beheld." If there were poetic agita-

tion it would be natural for him to express himself in verse; he would not be human, far less young and a poet, if he did not occasionally have such impulses of delicious agitation. In the Fifth Sonnet he makes confession to Diodati—a pathetic confidence, since his friend was probably dead when the lines were composed, although it was not until some time afterwards that the news of that event reached him:

> Diodati, and I will tell it thee with wonder,
> That wayward I, who used to scorn Love,
> And at his snares have often laughed,
> At last have fallen, where a good man at times
> is entangled.
>
> (Pattison's Translation.)

We may compare with this a passage from a letter in Latin, written when he was about seventeen. He is describing a walk in the country, and we catch a glimpse of his temperament:

> Here many a virgin troop I may descry
> Like stars of mildest influence, gliding by.
> Oh, forms divine! Oh, looks that might inspire
> Even Jove himself, grown old, with young desire!
> Oft have I gazed on gem-surpassing eyes,
> Out-sparkling every star that gilds the skies;
> Necks whiter than the ivory arm bestowed
> By Jove on Pelops, or the milky road!
> Bright locks, Love's wanton snare! then falling low,
> Then playing wanton o'er the graceful brow!
> Cheeks too, more winning sweet than after shower
> Adonis turned to Flora's favourite flower!
>
> (Elegy I., Cowper's Translation.)

A little later we find him expressing himself in not dissimilar vein; the passage is found in the Seventh

Elegy, also in Latin, composed while he was at London or Cambridge, and when he was between eighteen and nineteen years of age; Masson gives the meaning in a somewhat stilted translation, through which genuine emotion is not as convincingly apparent as one might desire:

"Often I scorned the arrows of Cupid as but boyish darts, and derided thy deity, most Great Love. * * * Anon, I am taking my pleasure, now in those places in the city where our citizens walk, and now in the rural neighbourhoods of the hamlets round. A frequent crowd —in appearance it might seem a crowd of goddesses— is going and coming splendidly along the middle of the ways; and the growing day shines with twofold brightness. I do not austerely shun those agreeable sights, but am whirled along wherever my youthful impulse carries me. Too improvident, I let my eyes meet their eyes, and am unable to master them. One by chance I beheld preëminent over the rest, and that chance was the beginning of my malady. Such as she would Venus wish herself to be seen by mortals; such as she was the queen of gods to be beheld of old. This fair one mischievous Cupid, remembering his threat, had thrown in my way; he alone wove the snare for me. Not far off was the sly god himself lurking, his many arrows and the great weight of his torch hanging from his back. And without delay he clings first to the maiden's eyebrow and then to her mouth; now he nestles in her lips and then he settles in her cheeks; and whatever parts the nimble archer wanders over, he wounds my unarmed heart, alas! in a thousand places."*

* Masson's translation, *Life of Milton*, I., 135–6.

There is a passage in *Paradise Lost* very similar to this, and it is interesting to note the difference between real poetry and its simulacrum. It is characteristic of the poet to retain in the sea of his memory whatever had once been swept there by any of its innumerable tributaries, sure to come to the surface again, perhaps after long lapse of time, in some new form of beauty. The poet is describing Satan's arrival in Paradise:

> As one who long in populous city pent,
> * * * * *
> Forth issuing on a summer's morn, to breathe
> Among the pleasant villages and farms
> Adjoined, from each thing met conceives delight—
> The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine,
> Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound;
> If chance with nymph-like step, fair virgin pass,
> What pleasing seemed, for her now pleases more,
> She most, and in her look sums all delight.
>
> (P. L., IX., 445–54.)

And again in his praise of Eve he has thrown into verse the expression of this same youthful sentiment:

> On her as queen
> A pomp of winning Graces waited still,
> And from about her shot darts of desire
> Into all eyes, to wish her still in sight.
>
> (P. L., VIII., 60–4.)

The poet elsewhere has his fling at "vulgar amourists," and he was far from being one of these himself, yet we see that in his youth he was by no means impervious to female charm; let us be thankful for that! His equipment was manifold; his mind, if not of a complexity like that of Shakespeare, was in the realm of scholarship

wide-reaching and all-embracing. He knew his Homer almost by heart, and his Euripides, but he was equally familiar with Ovid, and, much as it may surprise us, this amourist was his favourite among all the Latin poets; one would naturally have expected that his allegiance would have been first of all to the mighty Mantuan.

In the *Agonistes* he has lifted the veil from a passage of his own biography, one very intimate indeed, the scene of reconciliation with his first wife; and incidentally the poet, now no longer young, there acknowledges the irresistible sway of beauty and of passion:

> *Chorus.* Yet beauty, though injurious, hath strange power,
> After offence returning, to regain
> Love once possessed, nor can be easily
> Repulsed, without much passion felt,
> And secret sting of amorous remorse.
>
> (S. A., 1003–07.)

Does one question whether this Puritan were unimpressionable? Let us summon to recollection his portrait of Eve as the fallen Archangel first beheld her, at Adam's side:

> She, as a veil down to the slender waist,
> Her unadorned golden tresses wore
> Dishevelled, but in wanton ringlets waved,
> As the vine curls her tendrils—which implied
> Subjection, but required with gentle sway,
> And by her yielded, by him best received,
> Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
> And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.*
>
> (P. L., IV., 304–11.)

* "A series of verses so harmonious that my ear is impatient of any other poetry for several days after I have read them. * * * I would rather have written these two lines [the last two quoted] than all the poetry that has

It was this very susceptibility of the poet which was responsible for the haste of his first marriage. While he was in this mood of idealization, happening to behold her who afterwards became his wife,—

> At first all heavenly under virgin veil,
> Soft, modest, meek, demure,—
> (S. A., 1035–6.)

for the moment he was swept off his feet, and plunged into an alliance that was to bring happiness to neither of them.

VII

We may well rejoice that when Milton was brought into the presence of splendid Italian beauty he promptly fell in love, or at all events into song! He was either in love, or thought that he was in love, which is the next best thing, or made believe that he was in love, which, so far as poetry is concerned, is better than nothing at all! With all his transcendent power of mind and strength of will, he was still a very human sort of person indeed. Without question he was a Puritan of the Puritans, but was as well, with a poet's eagerness, responsive to beauty of every sort, in man or woman or sky or flower or in the human heart. Even the little traits of personal vanity which he betrays do not lessen him in our esteem; for instance, his pride in his youth upon his own skill with the broadsword, and his innocent boast that with this weapon he was more than a match for a larger man

been written since Milton's time in all the regions of the earth. * * * Here the sweetest of images and sentiments is seized and carried far away from all pursuers." Landor, *Southey and Landor; Imaginary Conversations*, ed. 1876, IV., p. 446.

than himself. It is not at all improbable that he was; he had a well-knit frame, a quick eye, a vigourous body, and was of temperate habits; he would as a matter of course, with his passion for thoroughness, have taken the necessary pains to perfect himself in the art. I think we may rest assured that he would render a good account of himself in any manly exercise to which he had devoted sufficient time for practice. No one better than he knew that an indextrous education is but half an education; unless the hand have its delight as well as the brain, man expresses himself only in part. Proficiency in music was Milton's passion, and the playing of the organ and the bass viol his especial relaxation and delight. When the angelic host wished to show their gratulation at an edict of the Most High, the poet informs us that—

> All Heaven
> Admiring stood a space; then into hymns
> Burst forth, and in celestial measures moved,
> Circling the throne and singing, *while the hand*
> *Sung with the voice.*
>
> (P. R., I., 168–172.)

Could there be a more emphatic record of the importance which he attached to the harmonious development of all of one's faculties, physical as well as mental? And this is consistent with the larger theme of the relation of body and soul, to which we have referred.

The graceful homage of the Italian sonnets is but the natural tribute of an idealist to perfection. One reads with delight a certain passage in a letter to Diodati in which he says: "God has instilled into me, at all events, a vehement love of the beautiful. Not with so

much labour is Ceres said to have sought Proserpine as I am wont day and night to seek for the idea of the beautiful through all the forms and faces of things, and to follow it leading me on as with certain assured traces." Susceptibility to the charm of woman he had without doubt; we have seen what Johnson had to say about this: —it may all be true, yet the poet had himself well in hand. Burns, if you like, possessed this temperament in fuller and more perilous endowment, but what impresses one above almost anything else in his character is the vigourous human sympathy that he had with every man or woman, or "Wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beastie," with whom he came in contact. This is not by any means the first thing that strikes one in Milton; he was ever responsive to beauty, and in women to the charms of sex and womanliness, but it can hardly be maintained that his sympathies with mere human beings, if they had not anything particularly to distinguish them, were very acute; and as for the ordinary run of mankind, for them he had little better than contempt:

> The common rout,
> That, wandering loose about,
> Grow up and perish as the summer fly.
> (S. A., 674–6.)

Or as he says elsewhere,—

> "A herd confused,
> A miscellaneous rabble, who extol
> Things vulgar."
> (P. R., III., 49–51.)

When we observe that it is from the mouth of Christ, tempted by Satan in the wilderness, that these last words

proceed, we can in some degree realize the ill esteem in which he held the mere "breathers" of mankind, "Heads without name, no more rememberéd": *

"For what is glory but the blaze of fame,
The people's praise, if always praise unmixed?
And what the people but a herd confused,
A miscellaneous rabble, who extol
Things vulgar, and well weighed, scarce worth the praise?
They praise and they admire they know not what,
And know not whom, but as one leads the other;
And what delight to be by such extolled,
To live upon their tongues, and be their talk?
Of whom to be dispraised were no small praise.
* * * * *
The intelligent among them and the wise
Are few, and glory scarce of few is raised."

(P. R., III., 47–59.)

Milton, though possessed by the passion for liberty, was as far removed as possible from those who would rank in equality the efficient with the inefficient, and would scale the power of one down to the helplessness of the other. If his were the aristocratic point of view, and if necessarily, in his opinion, there were better and worse among the sons of men, yet should the cleavage between superior and inferior be along lines of character and intellectual endowment and not at all along those of birth and privilege. He had little patience with the arbitrary and artificial distinctions of caste, inevitably putting a premium upon ineptitude, the most unaristocratic thing of all, and the one which he liked least. If he might be willing to concede that in the knapsack of

* S. A., 679.

every soldier of the Commonwealth a marshal's baton lay concealed, yet would he have the matter so cunningly contrived that only the eye of the most acute should ever detect it, and the hand of promptest capacity be allowed to grasp it.

While he was Latin Secretary in London, he lived, as he wrote a correspondent, "very close." This solitariness of disposition is a perfectly apparent trait of the poet, and this very aloofness constitutes a part of his distinction.* Wordsworth in his apostrophe to Milton at once seizes upon this characteristic of the poet:

> Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart;
> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;
> Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free.

He was devoted to his friends but not particularly desirous of extending their number, pleased rather with "contemplation and profound dispute" than with the refreshment and inspiration to be derived from human contact. Wordsworth was quite fitted to sympathize with this idiosyncrasy of Milton, for besides his shepherds and cottagers, whom he came to regard as his own discovery and in a way as belonging to him,—being at the same time quite willing that they should get along without aid or interference on his part,—he troubled himself little about the outside world. What he says of shunning personal gossip reveals a similar disposition of his own,—

* We find the same characteristic revealed in a letter of a later period: "I have very little acquaintance with those in power, inasmuch as I keep very much to my own house, and prefer to do so." Letter to Peter Heimbach, 1657.

> Nor can I not believe but that thereby
> Great gains are mine; for thus I live remote
> From evil speaking; rancour, never sought,
> Comes to me not, malignant truth or lie.

For humanity in the abstract his love was boundless. On the other hand, for the individual with his inevitable foibles and limitations his interest too often failed to be aroused, and this person remained to him the subject of indifference, if not actively of antipathy or disgust. It can hardly be claimed that patience of this particular sort was the distinguishing characteristic of either of these two men.

VIII

But three of the English sonnets were written before the blight of an unfortunate marriage fell upon his career, an obscuration destined for years to dim his poetic vision. Soon after this he found himself hopelessly involved in the intricacies and torments of pamphlet-writing; and then came blindness to eclipse altogether his physical sight.

Milton returned from the Continent in August, 1639. In Italy he had received delightful welcome as a distinguished stranger and poet, had experienced the hospitality of the Italian Academies, and of learned men in Florence, Rome, and Naples. These were the "gawdy days" of his whole career; never again was he to be so fully at his ease, or so much petted and admired. The life of scholarly relaxation and preferment to which they seemed to point, it was not to be his fortune to consummate. He had come home brimful of energy and ambition, and there exists in his own handwriting, recorded

within a year or two after his return, and probably begun immediately after that event, a long list of possible subjects for an epic poem, masque, or drama, in which precedence was given to the subject of *Paradise Lost;* a poem destined, however, not to be composed for twenty years.

After he had decided upon the epic form (in 1642), we have his own statement that he did not consider himself as yet fitted, or as sufficiently experienced and mature, for its production. Upon every youthful student of English literature the fact has been touchingly impressed that *Paradise Lost* was the creation of the "blind old Milton"! When he first began to write that poem he was fifty years of age; this, if one stops to reflect, does not seem so excessively venerable when compared with the age at which other men have achieved great things. Goethe was eighty when he finished the second part of *Faust,* and Tennyson of the same age when he wrote *Crossing the Bar.* Had Milton composed his epic soon after *Lycidas,* or at the age at which Ariosto and Tasso and Spenser had composed their epic poems, it would have been on the theme of Arthur, and in the Latin tongue, and we should have had in a foreign and disused language an Homeric rendering of the *Idylls of the King;* but not at that stage of his career, even if he had attempted to write his great poem in English, could he have presented with convincing majesty the glories of the Celestial City, the revolt of the heavenly host, and the adventures of Lucifer. The period of his life that we are considering was a tremendously formative one; the poet was to be brought into close contact with one of the most masterful personalities of modern

times, and in the turmoil of public events was to learn how a rebel might preserve his dignity and his lofty poise of mind even in Hell, or in the reign of that monarch which came next in succession to that of the sainted Charles.

Milton, upon his return, took rooms in London and devoted himself to the education of his nephews, Edward and John Philips (sons of his only sister, Anne), and of a sufficient number of other scholars to bring him money enough to live upon. The poet's nephew, in his Life of his uncle, carefully sets forth for our instruction the fact that his distinguished relative was never really a mere schoolmaster; "But only was willing to impart his learning and knowledge to his relatives and the sons of some gentlemen that were his intimate friends." Afterwards he goes on to add: "I am much mistaken, if there were not about this time a design in agitation of making him adjutant-general in Sir William Waller's army." Milton's efficiency with the broadsword would, as they say in the rural districts, "have come in handy" here, and it might seem as if this were about his only qualification for the post. How his nephew's aristocratic proclivities would have amused the poet; Philips was nothing if not genteel!

The nephew goes on to inform us about his uncle's acceptance of the Latin Secretaryship. "Being more and more taken notice of for his excellency of stile, and depth of judgment, he was courted into the service of the new Commonwealth, and at last prevailed with (for he never hunted after preferment, nor affected the tintamar and hurry of publick business) to take upon him the office of Latin Secretary to the Counsel of State, for all their letters to foreign princes and states; * * *

scorning to carry on their affairs in the wheedling, lisping jargon of the cringing French," etc.* The poet had escaped one danger which beset a scholar at that time even more than it would at the present day, the acceptance of a university fellowship. The man who for civil and personal liberty was willing to sacrifice everything in the world, and who, under what might almost appear to have been a mistaken sense of duty, did actually make the greatest sacrifice that poet could be called upon to offer,—the burying of that "one talent which is death to hide,"—was not the man to be bound by the restraints, the limitations and conventionalities of a university fellowship. That, it is not unlikely, would have given us a scholar of boundless erudition, but in all human probability he would never have written *Paradise Lost*. Whether affiliated with a university or not, he was by nature a scholar to his finger-tips, and traversed in his studies the vast realms of human learning and philosophy.

Can there be question that at London, and in the very heart of the revolutionary awakening, he felt the force of that movement as could not have been the case had he been instead a Cambridge recluse living in sheltered ease during all that time? The tragedy of the Revolution was now in full career; the royal army had been defeated by the Scotch Presbyterians in August, 1640, and the Long Parliament met in November of that year. No man in England was in fuller sympathy with the Puritan cause than Milton, or more alive than he to the

* Philips's *Life* of Milton, *Lives of Edward and John Philips*, edited by Godwin, 1815, p. 372.

How Denmark's Secretary of State would have loved this *"tintamar"*; "That's good; mobled queen is good!" And Philips's scorn of the frog-eating Frenchman is conceived in his loftiest mood!

abuses in the church. He was at this time among the communicants of that church, but was not among the number of those who were blind to its faults. The poet came from a family of advanced ideas; in his own case the progress of evolution was from conforming churchman of the Puritan wing,—and of course from the standpoint of this group the state church was just as genuinely their own as it was the church of the reactionaries. From Puritan-churchman the progress was easy to Presbyterian, Royalist, Independent, Commonwealth's man, Oliverian, and beyond that to the belief of no sect,—nearer perhaps to that of Fox, the founder of the Quakers, than to any other.* Milton was saved from the logical and extreme attitude toward affairs of conscience, as involved in matters of state, by his intimate knowledge of what was happening in the Council,—whose servant he became,—and by the conviction which he must have had, that the guidance of public affairs, so long as Cromwell lived, was in safe hands. Had his life at this time been at Cambridge or at Horton, far from Whitehall, it is not at all improbable that he would have opposed the Government which he was now eager to support. He was fortunate in being able to see things in their proper perspective. In the poet's development of religious affiliations he was but acting upon the example of his own father, who was born the son of a devout Catholic, and had been disinherited by him for joining the established church.† Father and son, these two, were

* "Milton moved forward, not because Cromwell and the rest advanced, but with Cromwell and the rest." Pattison, *Milton,* 121–2.

† In Aubrey's *Life of Milton* it is stated that his father, Richard Milton, "disinherited him [John Milton, Sr.] because he kept not to the Catholique Religion. He found a Bible, in English, in his chamber."

good consistent rebels. Strange indeed it would have seemed to them had they known that they were to share in the praise bestowed upon the Prince of the revolted hosts of Heaven,—and for the same qualities.

In *Lycidas,* written three years before this, he had characterized certain of the clergy in that scathing lament of Peter:

> "How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
> Enow of such as, for their bellies' sake,
> Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!"

—a passage ending in the prophetic lines:

> "But that two-handed engine at the door,
> Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."

So far as in him lay, Milton assisted at that retribution.

In 1641 he published his first pamphlet, (I.) *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England, and the Causes that hitherto have hindered it,* being in two books and attacking the bishops and the Established Church; after this followed in quick succession, (II.) *Of Prelatical Episcopacy,* being a reply to the most learned man in the English Church, Archbishop Usher, who had written a pamphlet called *The Apostolic Institution of Episcopacy,* and (III.) *The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty;* in this may be found some of the most famous passages of his prose —in this and in the first of the series, that on *Reformation.* Milton has somewhere spoken of the "cooler realms" of prose; certainly this is fervid enough, and glows with the intensity of emotion.* Then came, in

* Sometimes even it is actual poetry in disguise, as for instance, the passage quoted later; p. 209.

1642, (IV.) *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnuus,* which was an attack upon Bishop Hall, and, to say the least, a heated and acrimonious attack. One more pamphlet he wrote in this debate, (V.) *The Apology for Smectymnuus.*

These are to-day dreary reading for the most part, although they contain passages of noble English scattered like stars in the illimitable void of the skies. The *Reason of Church Government* presents on his part a distinct promise of some great work yet to be accomplished.

The energy of Milton's prose, when at its best, finds few parallels in our language,—perhaps none more striking than the prose of Carlyle, particularly in the *French Revolution.* In the writings of both of these authors a perfectly sane, powerful, and well-regulated intelligence was aroused to emotional intensity by the admiration of desperate endeavour devoted to a noble cause. In Carlyle the dramatic faculty struggled with the ethical as to which should predominate. We behold the poet, a "mute inglorious Milton" so far as song was concerned, expressing himself in concentrated fury, and compelling the periods of a mighty prose to glow and vibrate like impassioned verse. In Milton the rage of conflict, while it lasted, deprived him of anything approaching to judicial impartiality, at times it even robbed him of ordinary fairness; in Carlyle we behold the poetic temperament somewhat schooled to the requirements of judicial narrative, but still restive and tumultuous, always to a greater or less degree exalted. But these two men at least had this in common,—besides the fierce energy of their prose composition, each loved

Liberty with uncompromising devotion, and each served her with all his might, according to his several endowment.

Milton was in the midst of the battle, and had no reason to accuse himself of being a Laodicean, of living in scholarly ease and security during the heat and struggle of the day, while others were actually bearing arms and risking their lives in defence of their country. He was doing the best that in him lay, though with somewhat of temerity when he attacked a man of Usher's erudition and equipment and exalted station; "Being willing," he says, "to help the Puritans, who were inferior to the Prelates in learning," although "not disposed to this manner of writing, wherein knowing myself inferior to myself, led by the genial powers of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand."

IX

Such, then, were the circumstances of his life,—living in London, teaching his nephews, and aiding so far as he could with his pen the cause of Reformation,—when the royal army advanced upon the city, and was met almost in its suburbs, on the thirteenth of November, 1642, by the Parliamentary forces under Essex.

If any single incident in his life reveals Milton the scholar, we see it here. It was the scholar's instinct, deep and inbred, that made him in a time of agitation and distrust, while others were seeking excitement in running about the streets for news, quietly to sit down and express himself with calmness and dignity in verse, the only poetry that he had written in English since the

time of *Lycidas,* five years before. With the two armies, forty thousand men in arms, confronting each other within a few miles of his door, it showed serenity of spirit altogether admirable for him to compose these lines:

> Captain, or Cólonel, or Knight in arms,
> Whose chance on these defenceless doors may seize,
> If deed of honour did thee ever please,
> Guard them, and him within protect from harms.
> He can requite thee; for he knows the charms
> That call fame on such gentle acts as these,
> And he can spread thy name o'er lands and seas,
> Whatever clime the sun's bright circle warms.
> Lift not thy spear against the Muses' bower:
> The great Emathian conqueror bid spare
> The house of Pindarus, when temple and tower
> Went to the ground; and the repeated air
> Of sad Electra's poet had the power
> To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.

How crisp, and strong, and resonant the verses roll! His own later praise of

> "The secret power
> Of harmony, in tones and numbers hit,
> * * * and Dorian lyric odes,"
> (P. R., IV., 255–7.)

might with fitness be applied to this sonnet; it, also, is a Dorian lyric ode! If Milton did not possess a commanding sense of humour, he at least had a serenity and poise of mind that could lend the note almost of gaiety to what he composed; he had learned in his own heart the secret of "toil unsevered from tranquillity." How soon was he to be torn from this happy estate and plunged into the misery and distractions of multitudinous conflict!

The poet was doubtless familiar with a certain Life of Pindar by a Latin author, wherein the story is told of how the house of that poet was spared by reason of a notice posted on the door: "Burn not the dwelling of the poet Pindar," and it is not unlikely that he had this in mind when he wrote the original title to the sonnet: *On his dore when ye Citty expected an assault.* These words are found, crossed out, in the Cambridge manuscript. This sonnet structurally has peculiar excellence,—its rhymes are arranged according to strict rule, giving a tone of quiet dignity; the poet is completely master of himself, "playing almost with the steel bow of his verse."*

Observe the perfectly matter-of-course way in which this scholar,—

> Young in years, but in sage counsel old,—

ranks himself without vainglory, as without apology, with Pindar and with Euripides. One is reminded that in similar mood, in *Paradise Lost,* when he is discoursing of his blindness, he does not hesitate to compare himself with the inspired soothsayer Thamyris, and with great Homer:

> Those other two equalled with me in fate,
> So were I equalled with them in renown,
> Blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides.
>
> (P. L., III., 33–5.)

From the time of his marriage—1643—until 1658, the year in which the last sonnet was written, and when we

* From a letter to the author by the late Prof. F. York Powell of Christ's Church, Oxford.

In the fifth line of the sonnet the poet employs the word "charms" in

know that he was continuously at work upon *Paradise Lost,* Milton wrote about twenty pamphlets in English and Latin. Whether or not these possess a sweet reasonableness fitted to shape the opinions of men who differed from him, or whether they are of commanding value to after-times, may be the subject of discussion; this at least can truthfully be said,—Milton was desperately in earnest when he wrote them, and was thinking much more of vigourously attacking his adversary than of the verdict of posterity, or of anything else whatever. He was in the thick of the fight, with passions aroused, and it is hardly fair for us two centuries and a half later to judge him in cold blood. At the most, the matter can have for us but an academic interest; while it lasted, it was one of life and death to him.*

The scurrility and vindictiveness of the political and religious pamphlets were by the temper of the time deemed to be an acceptable service to the State and to the cause of God. It is not at all impossible that Milton may have had in mind his own contribution to the conflicts of the Commonwealth when, long afterwards, in the *Agonistes,* he made the Chorus say to Samson—

the sense of "verses," *carmina,* an echo of classical usage, always agreeable to him. The word has the same significance as in *Paradise Lost:*

> "Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
> With charm of earliest birds."
>
> (P. L., IV., 641–2.)

and in the *Agonistes,* Samson says to Dalila:

> "Thy fair enchanted cup, and warbling charms,
> No more on me have power."
>
> (S. A., 934–5.)

Milton also uses the word "charms" in the ordinary sense of "beguilement," as in S. A., 1040.

* Pattison vigourously characterizes the writings of this period in speaking of "the lurid fires which glare in the battailous canticles of his prose pamphlets." *Milton,* 14.

"In seeking just occasion to provoke
The Philistine, thy country's enemy,
Thou never wast remiss, I bear thee witness."
(S. A., 237–39.)

Even granting that Milton's contribution to the literary controversy of the time did not advance the cause of God's kingdom on earth and of Puritanism in England, yet was it of no slight importance to the man himself; his fighting blood was up, and he was striking good downright blows. He admits us to his confidence in one of the pamphlets: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks his adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for not without dust and heat." If there were fighting to be done, he must have his share.

Half of the pamphlets were written on church matters, and several of them at the order of the Council, whose servant he became in 1649. Charles was beheaded in January of that year, and on March 15, Milton took the oath of office as Latin Secretary to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which was composed of six members of the Council of State. In this latter body, which was elected annually, lay the real power of England, so that Milton as their servant was in close touch with great events. The position which he occupied was not of the first importance; this may be gathered from the circumstance that the English Secretary to the same Council received twice the salary that was paid to the Latin Secretary, and the latter was not intrusted with the original composition of despatches except in a few

instances.* The most important thing that he did in this capacity was to write in Latin, among other pamphlets in the same tongue, his *Defence of the English People,* Parts First and Second, yet these have but slight value for us to-day, and no one, except the special student, any longer takes the trouble to read them.

Milton, without question, was actuated by a sense of duty when he accepted this position of service to the Commonwealth, but it is not at all impossible that together with that motive, and acting as a more or less unconscious element of those complex influences which move one to a decision of moment, was the desire for an active career, and of contact and acquaintance with the leaders of Parliament and the State. This would be a temptation peculiarly hard for a scholar to resist, for one who had seen but little of the world of affairs, and for a man of his courageous temperament. It is exactly what we should expect, that he would take advantage of the opportunity thus offered. As early as the year 1641 he has given us a record of his determination to omit nothing that may fit him for his task, and has pledged himself to make use of every available means toward his own preparation for the great work to which he felt himself dedicate. This may not be accomplished except "by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observa-

* We do know that on one occasion a treaty with Sweden was delayed during Milton's absence owing to illness.

tion, insight into all seemly and generous acts and affairs." * In this passage we have recorded that theory of life, if it may be so called, which had come to dominate him even so early as this,—a full decade before the chance came for him to sit at the council-board of the nation during one of the most exciting periods of her history. In the sonnet written on his twenty-third birthday, he has admitted us to his confidence; his firm resolve is shown, the same in youth as in age,—

> Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure even
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven.

We may find in his later verse a record of his feeling at this time. In that memorable scene in the desert, in *Paradise Regained,* one of the temptations offered to Christ by Satan is a knowledge of the world and of courts:

> "Empires, and monarchs, and their radiant courts—
> Best school of best experience."
>
> (P. R., III., 237–8.)

Meditating upon the events of those earlier years, the poet doubtless recalled what his own attitude of mind at that time had been. Who, with imagination fired by the success of the Parliamentary cause, could help feeling the enticement of the occasion! There is a passage in Chaucer which, if he could have overlooked the con-

* *The Reason of Church-government urged against Prelaty,* Prose Works, Bohn ed., II., 481.

text, might have expressed his own sentiments as he would wish them to be at the end of his career:

> It doth mine hertë bootë
> That I have had my world as in my time.

Who can say that he chose not wisely! It may have taken participation in the intensest life of his time to fire his genius to the creation of that which he was afterwards to portray in *Paradise Lost*. So far as the world of letters is concerned, we are the gainers by the misery of the Revolution. That Milton should cease for the time to be a poet might at first seem only ill fortune, but it may have been a blessing in disguise, just as blindness itself would appear to have been calamity without compensation, yet the result even of that was to give great and vivid concentration of poetic vision when he afterwards came to write, and without doubt this affliction added an element of pathetic comprehension of his theme when he composed the *Agonistes*. But as we ponder on the tragic disappointments of his life it seems at first hard to say which appears the greater misfortune, —that he should be blind at forty-three years of age, or that he should be forced to forego for twenty years, with the risk of never doing it at all, the realization in literature of that great work which he knew himself fitted by genius to perform.

In the light of after events the closing verse of *Lycidas* is not without pathos:

> To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

When the poet penned these words he had doubtless thought that soon again his hand was to touch—

> The tender stops of various quills,
> With eager thought warbling his Doric lay;
> (Lycidas, 188–9.)

but, instead, they mark the close of a period of his life, one of three divisions, well defined and distinct. Before he was again to resume his singing robes his feet were to wander in the intricate mazes of polemical disquisition, and he was to imperil the performance of that service to which he believed his life to be consecrated. The awful perils of that delay, had he foreseen the time that was to elapse before he was to resume his appointed task, might well have filled his soul with apprehension.

We have the credible evidence of Aubrey's *Memoir of Milton,* based on the statement of the poet's nephew, Edward Philips, that he had in the same year in which this sonnet was written, or in the succeeding year, already composed certain verses now found in the Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost.* These were at the time intended to be part of a tragedy on the same theme which was afterwards elaborated into the epic poem. The passage has the true Miltonic ring and is of especial interest to us here as belonging to the period which we are now considering. Philips records that these lines then "were shown to me, and some others, as designed for the very beginning of the said tragedy": *

> "O thou that, with surpassing glory crowned,
> Look'st from thy sole dominion like the god
> Of this new World; at whose sight all the stars
> Hide their diminished heads; to thee I call,
> But with no friendly voice, and add thy name,

* What those others were must in all human probability remain unknown.

O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams,
That bring to my remembrance from what state
I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere,
Till pride and worse ambition threw me down,
Warring in Heaven against Heaven's matchless King!"
(P. L., IV., 32–41.)

Philips could not have been literally exact in his record, since it is impossible that this should have been the opening passage of the *Prologue* in a drama composed in the classical manner, after the usage of Euripides, but would naturally be spoken by Satan at some time later in the development of the play.

Milton's plan, which he had long meditated, of making a drama rather than an epic poem on the theme of *Paradise Lost,* was not without influence on that poem when the time came to compose it, and helps to account for the fact that it is conceived, not so much in the spirit of the other great world epics,—those of Homer, Dante, and Tasso,—as in that of the ancient classical drama, with whose spirit he was impregnated, and whose dignity and stern, swift action appealed with peculiar force to the mingled traits of a character at once that of the scholar and of the Puritan.

The composition of *Paradise Lost* began when Milton was fifty years of age, but the idea of it was conceived by him when he was thirty-two; we have in his handwriting in 1641 four drafts, in greater or less detail, of the plot and general development of *Paradise Lost,* so that for a quarter of a century the poet was brooding over this theme, and doubtless during that period his mind recurred to it thousands of times, and in the completed poem we have the result of that deliberate medi-

tation. Only by a method similar to this could the grand scheme of architecture to which the whole edifice conforms, have shaped itself in his imagination so magnificently and in such perfect proportion.

X

Two years of civil strife elapsed before Milton composed the Ninth Sonnet, addressed *To a Virtuous Young Lady,* a certain Miss Davis, with whose life, if he might have done so when his wife deserted him the preceding year, he fain would have united his own. The sonnet is conceived in a mood of dignity and tenderness; one is moved by its very simplicity.

> Lady, that in the prime of earliest youth
> Wisely hath shunned the broad way and the green,
> And with those few art eminently seen
> That labour up the hill of heavenly Truth;
> The better part with Mary and with Ruth
> Chosen thou hast; and they that overween,
> And at thy growing virtues fret their spleen,
> No anger find in thee, but pity and ruth.
> Thy care is fixed, and zealously attends
> To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,
> And hope that reaps not shame. Therefore be sure
> Thou, when the Bridegroom with his feastful friends
> Passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night,
> Hast gained thy entrance, Virgin wise and pure.

If this be a love-song, it is indeed composed after a strictly Puritan formula.

The second of Milton's four sonnets addressed to women is conceived in a different vein. Philips tells us,

in his Life of his uncle, that one of Milton's friends at this time was the wife of a Captain Hobson, the Lady Margaret Ley (or Leigh), daughter of James Ley, knighted when Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench in Ireland, where he was hated for his severity. Eventually he became the first Earl of Marlborough, was Lord High Treasurer and President of the Council under King James and Charles I., and had been an active supporter of the Parliamentary cause. Milton addressed to the daughter of this man the quiet and dignified sonnet which begins—

> Daughter to that good Earl, once President
> Of England's Council and her Treasury,
> Who lived in both unstained with gold or fee,
> And left them both, more in himself content,
> Till the sad breaking of that Parliament
> Broke him, as that dishonest victory
> At Chæronea, fatal to liberty,
> Killed with report that old man eloquent.

The reference in the last lines is, of course, to Isocrates, to whom Milton was indebted for the title of the most famous of his prose works, the *Areopagitica,* named after the treatise of similar title by that philosopher.* The sestet of the sonnet continues,—

> Though later born than to have known the days
> Wherein your father flourished, yet by you,
> Madam, methinks I see him living yet:

* In Milton's great argument for unlicensed printing, he refers to Isocrates, in a vein similar to that of the sonnet: "And out of those ages, to whose polite wisdom and letters we owe that we are not yet Goths and Jutlanders, I could name him who from his private house wrote that discourse to the parliament of Athens, that persuades them to change the form of democracy which was then established." Prose Works, Bohn Ed., II., 52.

So well your words his noble virtues praise
That all both judge you to relate them true
And to possess them, honoured Margaret.*

Structurally the sonnet is correct in one detail which Milton disregards in the majority of his sonnets, —the observance of the pause between the octave and sestet. The last lines come as near the epigrammatic ending, without actually falling into error, as may with safety be approached. Shakespeare's not unusual custom was to conclude with an epigram,—the form which he employed, of three quatrains and a couplet, favouring this method,—but since his time the practice of English sonneteers has crystallized into a different usage. Shakespeare, although quite ignoring the classical form, as a rule instinctively observes the pause after the octave, and advances the thought to a higher stage in the sestet. The progress of the octave and sestet has been likened to the motion in rise and descent of a ball; the momentary pause at the turn of the ball, where it seems to stop to think about going home again, is that at the end of the octave. The simile just fails of being a perfect one, but a sonnet written on this plan falls into the vice of epigram itself, —the action comes to an end with a crash, instead of

* In Philips's *Life* of his uncle he tells us how Milton, being deserted by his wife, and "as it were a single man again, made it his chief diversion now and then of an evening to visit the Lady Margaret Lee. * * * This lady, being a Woman of Great Wit and Ingenuity, had a particular honour for him, and took much delight in his Company, as likewise her Husband, Captain Hobson, a very Accomplished Gentleman." Another of Milton's friends, the poet's nephew informs us, was Lady Ranelagh: "he was frequently visited by persons of quality, particularly by my lady Ranala, whose son for some time he instructed," and when she went to Ireland in 1656, the poet "grieves for the loss of the one acquaintance which was worth all the rest." *Lives of Edward and John Philips,* etc., edited by William Godwin, 1815, pp. 367, etc.

quietly lapsing like a spent wave gently receding from the shore. To compare small things with great, the sestet should bear the same relation to the octave that the New Testament does to the Old; it should be the fulfilment and consummation of the former's hopes and promise. The purpose of the former is to prepare our minds for the reflection, inspiration, lesson, or revelation held in the latter.

XI

In the two sonnets next in order one recognizes an echo of the divorce pamphlets. Only unhappiness had come into Milton's life from his marriage, now two years past. During that time his mind, in hot and rebellious ferment, had thrown off the four pamphlets on Divorce, three hundred and seventy-five octavo pages, considerably more in volume than the entire mass of the five pamphlets directed against Episcopacy. Heaven help the man to-day who tries to read them all; nor is it necessary that one should laboriously toil through their weary pages in order to understand the poet. His soul had been tried in sore distress, and in the end rose stronger from the ordeal. The supreme achievement of *Paradise Lost,*—placing him, in Shelley's words,—

The third among the sons of light,—

was due in part to the trial of this fiery furnace through which he passed. As he bowed his head beneath that torment, little could he see of any conceivable profit or compensation; only after the lapse of many years and after the chastening influence of love and death could he reconcile himself to disappointment and sorrow:

"All is best, though oft we doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of Highest Wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close."
(S. A., *Chorus,* 1745–8.)

The poet has told us of the unpremeditated and spontaneous quality of his verse; the same cannot be said for that of his humour, but he has placed on record his own feeling in regard to the facetious mood in which the two sonnets which followed upon the divorce pamphlets were conceived. In the *Apology for Smectymnuus,* written three years previously, he quotes, in homely translation, a passage from the First Satire of Horace:

Laughing to teach the truth
What hinders? as some teachers give to boys
Junkets and knacks, that they may learn apace;

and in another passage from the same poem, of similar import, he says—

Joking decides great things
Stronglier and better oft than earnest can.*

In one of these sonnets occurs a happy description of the pamphlets as—

Woven close, both matter, form, and style.

The characterization applies equally well to his prose generally; whether the textile which he would describe were or were not always adorned with purple patches, one may rest assured that it was strong and well woven

* These verses furnish good examples of Milton's well-known use of homely words; in his hands a weapon of force. He has given us a further commentary in regard to the same subject: "And although in the serious uncasing of a grand imposture there be mixed here and there such a grim

and bore a certain mark of quality and distinction, the inherent characteristic of everything that proceeded from his mind.*

Quite as a matter of course, and without ostentation, the author states that this treatise had its vogue for a time, among its readers "numbering good intellects." He was not one to have doubts in regard to the sort of mind to which his writings would appeal, neither then nor at any period of his career. In the canzone, the reference was to himself when he wrote,—

> Other streams,
> Other banks await thee, and waters other,
> On whose green margin
> Already blooms for thy hair
> The immortal guerdon of unfading wreaths.
> (PATTISON'S TRANSLATION.)

In the Introduction to the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,* addressed "to the Parliament of England, with the Assembly," published two years previously, he had given expression practically to the same idea: "I seek not to seduce the simple and illiterate; my errand is to find out the choicest and the learnedest, who have this high gift of wisdom, to answer solidly or to be convinced."† Halfway toward the completion of *Paradise Lost* his prayer to the Heavenly Muse is that he may find pre-

laughter as may appear at the same time in an austere visage, it cannot be taxed of levity or insolence: for even this vein of laughing * * * hath oft-times a strong and sinewy force in teaching and confuting." *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence,* etc., Prose Works, Bohn Ed., III., 44.

* "Milton's prose is not poetical prose, but a different thing, the prose of a poet; not like [Jeremy] Taylor's, loaded with imagery on the outside; but coloured by imagination from within." Mark Pattison, *Milton,* 68.

† Prose Works, Bohn Ed., III., 179.

cisely this group of readers,—Matthew Arnold's "remnant,"—

> Still govern thou my song,
> Urania, and fit audience find, though few.
> (P. L., VII., 30–1.)

As well of his poetry as of his prose it may be said that it appeals to the aristocracy of readers, to those of discriminating understanding and to those sensitive and responsive to the best. Here one finds no idle rhyme to beguile a tedious hour, but strong verse, demanding strength of intelligence to apprehend, and mental vigour and alertness to appreciate and enjoy. Milton cared not at all for the other sort of reader. Half of his early poems were in Latin, and, as we have seen, his original purpose had been that *Paradise Lost* should be written in that language; both his poetry and his prose were for the edification of scholars, and so far as he was concerned all other persons were as if they did not exist.

XII

The Thirteenth Sonnet, written in the same year as the preceding, appeared in print for the first time, prefixed to a book of music by Henry Lawes and his brother, two years later. Milton's obligation to Lawes, described by him as a "Gentleman of the King's Chapel, and one of his Majesty's private music," was great. Lawes was twelve years older than the poet, and Milton had known him since his own boyhood, and was doubtless acquainted also with the circle of musical people in which he moved. It was Lawes who, being instructed by the

Bridgewater family* to produce the music for a masque to be presented before the Countess-Dowager of Derby by the young people of her family, requested Milton to write the libretto. The *Arcades* was composed for that occasion and was presented at Harefield House. It is quite probable that Lawes, although we do not certainly know that such was the case, may have enacted the part of the Genius of the Wood in this, as later in *Comus* he took the part of the Attendant Spirit. The success of that first musical festival was so evident that when this accomplished musician was again called upon by the Bridgewater family for another masque, this time to celebrate the inauguration of the Earl of Bridgewater as Lord President of Wales, they naturally looked to Milton for the text, and *Comus* was the result.

The *Arcades* was composed to be acted before Alice, Lady Strange, afterwards the Dowager Lady Derby, by her grandchildren, and *Comus* was written for her son-in-law, Lord Bridgewater. In the person of Lady Derby we have a connecting link between Milton and Spenser, since both of these poets dedicated verses to her. She was the "sweet Amaryllis" of Spenser's *Colin Clout 's Come Home Again*, composed nearly forty years before this, and to her Spenser had dedicated his *Teares of the Muses*, excusing his presumption for so doing by reason of ties of blood. Milton has acknowledged his indebtedness to Spenser, whose elevation of mind and sustained quality of pure poetic imagination appealed with peculiar force to the Puritan poet, and Dryden has reported that he referred to him in conversation as his "master," a distinction accorded to no one else; so it is

* In 1633.

not of slight interest to find these two poets engaged in an identical task, binding as with a ring of gold the ages, far separated in so many ways, of Elizabeth and of the Commonwealth.

The achievement of the *Arcades,* standing by itself, was slight as compared with that of *Comus,* since the former consisted merely of three songs and a brief monologue; but the creation of that masque, by a natural sequence of events, led to the production of the latter poem, which was Milton's most sustained poetic effort before the production of *Paradise Lost,* and which sounds a note of youthfulness and of exuberant vitality which we could ill spare.

Comus was printed three years later by Lawes without the name of its author, who was then twenty-eight years of age. Except a few fragments of this poem which had found their way into print, this was his first appearance before the public. All of Milton's verse of this middle period was stimulated by some outside circumstance, and English literature stands indebted in no slight degree to Lawes for enlisting him in this particular service. Milton says of him—

> Thou honour'st verse, and verse must lend her wing
> To honour thee, the priest of Phœbus' quire.

In *Comus,* the Elder Brother addresses Thyrsis, impersonated by Lawes, in words which have a direct application to the musician:

> "Thyrsis! whose artful strains have oft delayed
> The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,
> And sweetened every musk-rose of the dale."
>
> (Comus, 494–6.)

Earlier in the same poem words of similar import are put into the mouth of the Attendant Spirit, whom Lawes is impersonating: "But first I must," he says, "take the likeness of a swain,"—

> "Who with his soft pipe and smooth-dittied song,
> Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,
> And hush the waving woods."
>
> (Comus, 86–8.)

The poet's tribute to the musician is most courteous,—having in mind to bestow praise, he gives it with a generous hand,—the circumstance that one was a Puritan and the other a Royalist and courtier does not at all detract from the cordiality of their relations. This was all the more creditable to them both since political feeling at this time was running high. In the political world things were now happening with terrific rapidity; less than a year was to elapse before Charles was to be brought to his death, a lesson in constitutional law that Englishmen over seas were to take to heart.

The sonnet marks a very pleasant phase of the poet's character.

> Harry, whose tuneful and well-measured song
> First taught our English music how to span
> Words with just note and accent, * *
> * * * * * *
> Thy worth and skill exempts thee from the throng,
> With praise enough for Envy to look wan;
> To after ages thou shalt be writ the man
> That with smooth air couldst humour best our tongue.

The sonnet ends with a reference to another musician whom Dante besought to sing in the nether world, in

shades milder than those of the Infernal Regions which he had just left:

> Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
> Than his Casella, whom he wooed to sing,
> Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.

It is not often that Milton calls attention to the technical mysteries of his craft. That he was a profound student of every conceivable device of the artist by which the effect of verse is attained we may rest assured; to refinements of this nature are we indebted in no slight degree for the power and freshness and ever-varying charm of his poetry. That his facility in this was instinctive as well as the result of lifelong study—like Turner's mastery of rocks and trees and clouds—makes it none the less remarkable and amazing. In this sonnet he records his conviction that poetry should not use words in unusual guise; the poet is cautioned to "span words with just note and accent," not to scan with dull perception, mismatching short syllables with long ones. Since Milton's ear was faultless, this was exactly the sort of error he was least likely to commit.* The poet's ever-varying skill in versification in a poem of the length of *Paradise Lost,* exercised with constant variety and without wearying the reader, is to be compared with nothing less than Beethoven's resourcefulness in musical composition, his infinite subtleties of orchestration, the surprise and mystery and sustained majesty of it all.

Much learned disquisition has been lavished in the

* It is to be noted that in the sonnet he uses this very word "commit" in the Latin sense of *committere* "[as] in such a phrase as *committere pugiles,* to match gladiators in the circus." Masson, Notes to the Sonnets.

analysis of the poetic forms of Milton's verse, the mind being thereby too often diverted from its beauty and its meaning to the study of its internal frame,—anatomy being that science which presupposes the death of its subject;—the painstaking investigation of poetic forms and the art of the anatomist being in certain respects very much alike, both of service to mankind, but neither primarily occupied with problems of grace or vitality. Doubtless Milton understood the varying intricacies of "Bacchics and amphibrachs and cretics rare,"* but he did not let it at all interfere with the charm of his words and the flow of his verse.

XIII

THE next of the sonnets, the fifth of those composed perhaps in this year,† was dedicated to the religious memory of Mistress Catherine Thomson, known only to us as the friend of the poet. When Milton was Latin Secretary he had his lodgings at the house of a man named Thomson, and it is not impossible that this "Mistress Thomson" was the unmarried daughter of that person. She died in December, 1646. In the manuscript there were several changes in the verse before the poet finally got it to his mind. Three copies exist, and the alterations, as we might expect, are made with a sure touch. The verse is unornate, almost staid; no Miltonic grandeur disturbs the humility of spirit in which it is conceived. It is as if he who composed it stood in the presence of a good and simple woman, and being permitted to offer the reflections which naturally arose in

* Prof. Verity, *Introduction to Paradise Lost,* LXIX.
† 1645–6.

his mind upon her death, had permitted us to share the emotions of the moment. His intent was not other than to render a simple service, and as he has not failed to accomplish this, his verse has succeeded in its purpose; it is in the mood of a Psalm of David. Hallam speaks of "the majestic simplicity, the holy calm, that ennoble many of these short compositions";* in so writing he may well have had this brief poem in mind.

When Faith and Love, which parted from thee never,
Had ripened thy just soul to dwell with God,
Meekly thou didst resign this earthy load
Of death, called life, which us from life doth sever.
Thy works, and alms, and all thy good endeavour,
Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod;
But, as Faith pointed with her golden rod,
Followed thee up to joy and bliss forever.
Love led them on; and Faith, who knew them best
Thy handmaids, clad them o'er with purple beams
And azure wings, that up they flew so drest,
And spake the truth of thee on glorious themes
Before the Judge; who thenceforth bid thee rest,
And drink thy fill of pure immortal streams.

These were the traits lauded in *Comus:*

The crown that Virtue gives,
After this mortal change, to her true servants
Amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats.
(Comus, 9–11.)

A similar expression of the Puritan's attitude of mind, without qualification or disguise, is found in *Paradise Lost* in the words of the Almighty to his Son, when the

* *Literature of Europe*, III., 264.

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latter has announced his purpose to save man by himself undergoing death,—the tone is well-nigh identical with that of the sonnet:

> "Because thou hast, though throned in highest bliss
> Equal to God, and equally enjoying
> God-like fruition, quitted all to save
> A world from utter loss, and hast been found
> By merit more than birthright Son of God—
> Found worthiest to be so by being good,
> Far more than great or high; because in thee
> Love hath abounded more than glory abounds;
> Therefore thy humiliation shall exalt
> With thee thy manhood also to this throne:
> * * * * *
> With Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth."
> (P. L., III., 305–338.)

Milton had long before this written other verses on a similar theme: first, *On the Death of a Fair Infant,* the child of his sister Anne; and again, a poem *On the Death of the Marchioness of Winchester.* The latter was composed two years after the *Hymn on the Nativity,* and shortly before Milton took his Master's degree; in this the youthful poet has made use of the accepted attributes of elegy, but has contributed genuine feeling of his own and a certain poetic charm. This is not an inexperienced hand that strikes the lyre, and one listens to the sad, sweet notes convinced that the sensibilities of the poet were aroused. Hallam so highly valued the distinction of this poem that he felt justified in saying of it: "Rarely can we find more feeling of beauty than in some [of its] passages." *

* *Literature of Europe,* III., 263.

Again in *Lycidas* was he called upon to expound a similar theme in recording the loss sustained by the University in the untimely death of Edward King, who was drowned in crossing the Irish Sea, and this poem was undoubtedly tinged by a very real mood of sadness upon the poet's part since he had but recently lost his own mother, and, in a certain sense, we must regard the poem as a tribute to her just as much as to King, with whom his acquaintance had been but slight. His emotions had been deeply stirred by his mother's death, and the immortal verses of *Lycidas* respond to that feeling. The true vibration of this instrument is due to more than the casual touch demanded by perfunctory verse.

Again, in the *Epitaphium Damonis* he gave expression to the very real grief which had come to him by reason of the death of his most intimate friend, the dearly beloved Charles Diodati. The poem, in spite of its being in Latin, is pervaded by a very human mood of tenderness which we may still detect in Cowper's sympathetic translation, the limpid purity of whose mind was admirably suited to render this affectionate tribute of a youth deploring the death of his companion. Milton, with his sensitive and retiring temperament, was not one readily to respond to close ties of friendship; and having formed this bond of affection, he prized it exactly in proportion to its rareness and to the difficulty,—to the impossibility,—of replacing it when death had deprived him of its comfort and its solace. It is genuine grief that finds its outlet in these verses; the fountain from which they spring lies close to the source of tears:

> We scarce in thousands meet one kindred mind;
> And if the long-sought good at last we find,

When least we fear it, Death our treasure steals,
And gives our heart a wound that nothing heals.*

Finally, in the last of the sonnets he again stands in the presence of Death, this time when it has robbed him of the one deepest satisfaction of human companionship which had entered into his life.

XIV

THE first of the sonnets addressed to statesmen is dedicated "To the Lord General Fairfax at the Siege of Colchester,"—or, as the manuscript title reads, *On the Lord General Fairfax at the Siege of Colchester.* Probably it was never actually presented to the General himself but was merely composed in his honour, and perhaps handed around to be read by those of like mind who were interested in, and were so eagerly following, the progress of public affairs. It is an expression of delight and of congratulation at the success of the Independent army, rather than a personal address to the General, or eulogy of the man. The same may be said of the sonnet addressed to Cromwell; it is the occasion that Milton has in mind rather than the person. In the sonnet which we are considering he is commemorating the successful siege of Colchester, the surrender of which town marked the final defeat of the King's army. Fairfax was the Commander-in-chief of the Parliamentary forces, and for the character and ability of this general the poet had the highest esteem; elsewhere he says of him that he "united the utmost fortitude with the utmost courage." †

* *Epitaphium Damonis,* Cowper's translation, 108–11.
† *Defensio Secunda,* translated by Robert Fellowes; Prose Works, Bohn Ed., I., 286.

Fairfax, whose name in arms through Europe rings,
Filling each mouth with envy or with praise,
And all her jealous monarchs with amaze,
And rumours loud that daunt remotest kings;
Thy firm unshaken virtue ever brings
Victory home, though new rebellions raise
Their Hydra heads, and the false North displays
Her broken league to imp their serpent wings.*

Milton's idea is that the winged Hydra of rebellion against the Commonwealth is being strengthened by the Scotch who are now marching an army into England for the purpose of rendering aid to the Royalists; for them, with "their serpent wings," he has no mercy.

The closing verses show that, Milton-like, he was not at all disposed to rest satisfied with victory over the opposing armies while Parliament acted from any motives other than the most pure and the most patriotic:

O yet a nobler task awaits thy hand
(For what can war but endless war still breed?)
Till truth and right from violence be freed,
And public faith cleared from the shameful brand
Of public fraud. In vain doth Valour bleed,
While Avarice and Rapine share the land.

The sonnets to Fairfax, Cromwell and Sir Henry Vane, and the second of those to Cyriack Skinner, naturally could not be published during the reign of Charles II., being of too radical and republican a tone to make that wise or expedient at the time. They were first printed in a somewhat emended and less irritating form, at the end of the *Life* of Milton, by his nephew, Edward

* In the last line Milton makes use of a term of falconry; a hawk's wing is said to be "imped" when new feathers are added to replace those which are broken.

Philips, which was prefixed to the translation of his State Papers in 1694, twenty years after the poet's death. They were not included among his poems until the fifth edition in 1713; fortunately they all exist in manuscript. David Main, whose criticism of Milton is discriminating, has said of this group of four sonnets: "It would be difficult to name an equal number of Milton's other poems exhibiting so marked a Miltonic physiognomy." *

The siege of Colchester was in July and August, 1648; Charles was beheaded in the following January. At this time Milton was still living quietly in London, his time fully occupied in teaching his nephews and in various literary tasks. We know that he was busy in the compilation of a *Latin Dictionary,* in the writing of a *History of England* from the most remote times, in the arrangement of a *Digest of Christian Doctrine* from the Bible, and in the metrical translation of nine Psalms from the Hebrew. The compilation of a *Latin Dictionary,* while still a young man with his career as poet ever in mind,—and before blindness came to render this task impossible,—reveals his passion for words, and his delight in ascertaining their exact significance; "a power," he assures us, "which is got within me to a passion." † To make such a "Thesaurus" seemed to him one of the things best worth doing. No one in the English-speaking world has possessed a surer instinct for the capacities and capabilities of words, and in the compilation of this dictionary we see the record of the poet's painstaking study. The time spent at this task is to be com-

* Main's *Treasury of English Sonnets,* 343.
† *Areopagitica.*

pared with the musician's relentless and persistent hours of practice. This occupation of the poet gives one an insight as to the means employed by him to attain that mastery of language which in its exercise seems so easy, so instinctive and inevitable.

The next sonnet, addressed to Cromwell, was not written for four years. During this time he had produced the pamphlet, important at the time, on *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates,* which was of influence in fixing the choice of the Council upon him for Latin Secretary. After his appointment to this position he had been fully occupied with the new duties of the office, and in producing pamphlets at the order of the Council.

When Milton was appointed Latin Secretary, the first Civil War was over and Cromwell was making preparations for his Irish campaign. Milton had now been totally blind for little more than a month, from which cause he was not for the time being in attendance at the meetings of the Council. He therefore made use of his verse to urge Cromwell, who was a member of the Committee before whom the matter was to come, to oppose to the full extent of his power and influence a ministry supported by tithes. Cromwell, however, did not regard this matter in exactly the same light as did Milton, to whom an argument based on right reason was irresistibly convincing, apart from all considerations of policy and of the harmonious blending of conflicting interests.

One naturally turns to the sonnet on Cromwell for Milton's estimate of the other's greatness, but for that we must look elsewhere; it is set forth in the *Defensio Secunda,* published two years later. Fortunately we

have a translation of this passage full of dignity, by a scholar who was deeply appreciative of elegant Latin, if not altogether approving of Milton himself—by no less an authority than Dr. Johnson: "A translation," he tells us, "may show its servility; but its elegance is less attainable. Cæsar, when he assumed the perpetual dictatorship, had not more servile or more elegant flattery." "Nor, he might have added," comments Mr. Richard Garnett, "had Augustus encomiums more heartfelt and sincere."

" 'We were left,' says Milton, 'to ourselves; the whole national interest fell into your hands, and subsists only in your abilities. To your virtue, overpowering and resistless, every man gives way, except some who, without equal qualifications, aspire to equal honours, who envy the distinctions of merit greater than their own, or who have yet to learn that in the coalition of human society nothing is more pleasing to God, or more agreeable to reason, than that the highest mind should have the sovereign power. Such, sir, are you by general confession; such are the things achieved by you, the greatest and most glorious of our countrymen, the director of our public councils, the leader of unconquered armies, the father of your country; for by that title does every good man hail you with sincere and voluntary praise.' "*

The sonnet to Cromwell, as the title in the original

* The poet may well have had in mind the commanding personality of his great chief when he made Satan say, in sight of Paradise and our first parents:

"And, should I at your harmless innocence
Melt, as I do, yet public reason just—
Honour and empire— * * *
* * * compels me now
To do what else, though damned, I should abhor."
(P. L., IV., 388–92.)

manuscript indicates, was written rather invoking aid than in a spirit of adulation. Its title reads—*To the Lord General Cromwell, May 1652, on the Proposals of Certain Ministers at the Committee for Propagation of the Gospel.* The purpose of the proposal to which Milton refers was to defeat the Presbyterians, who were desirous of providing a maintenance by tithes for their church.

> Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud
> Not of war only, but detractions rude,
> Guided by faith and matchless fortitude,
> To peace and truth thy glorious way hast ploughed,
> And on the neck of crowned Fortune proud
> Hast reared God's trophies, and his work pursued,
> While Darwen stream, with blood of Scots imbrued,
> And Dunbar field, resounds thy praises loud,
> And Worcester's laureate wreath: yet much remains
> To conquer still; Peace hath her victories
> No less renowned than War: new foes arise,
> Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.
> Help us to save free conscience from the paw
> Of hireling wolves, whose Gospel is their maw.

The last lines of the sestet have been variously commented upon by editors for two centuries and a half. Unless I am mistaken, there is a gleam of Miltonic irony here, a sort of savage playfulness in place of humour. The rhyme is significant of contempt; it is the only instance where Milton used a rhymed couplet for the ending to a sonnet.*

* There is an archæological aspect of this sonnet which is not without interest; the fourth line reads—

"To peace and truth thy glorious way hast ploughed."

The phrase was peculiarly familiar to the people of the time, since certain of the silver coins of the Commonwealth bore this inscription around the

So far as he could, Milton was rendering aid to the Parliamentary cause. Elsewhere he has recorded his attitude of mind: "For he who freely magnifies what hath been nobly done, and fears not to declare as freely what might be done better, gives * * * the best covenant of his fidelity." * The subject under discussion was one on which he felt very strongly, and with regard to which he entertained no mental reservations whatever. It was his belief that matters pertaining to the life of the spirit should be kept severely separate from material reward. To say that he disbelieved in the desirability of a "hireling ministry" is to state the matter very moderately; he has not left us in any doubt in regard to that. He would scarify with the lash of his ridicule those time-servers of the Rump Parliament who constituted the Committee having this in charge, and who were disposed to treat the matter in a spirit of leniency and compromise. Milton was not in a mood to temporize in the slightest degree with such persons as received pay for acting as intermediaries between man and God, or with any one who interfered with the simple, direct relations between the created and his Creator. He believed that God is a Spirit and should be worshipped in spirit and in truth;—to attempt to accomplish this by the ministration of another person seemed to him nothing short of an impertinence.

This was a time of intense conviction in all matters relating to worship; men freely gave their lives for what they believed to be the truth. Milton's attitude remained unchanged on this subject from the period of

edge: "Truth and Peace: 1651." Bishop Newton, Notes to *Poetical Works of Milton.*

* *Areopagitica,* Prose Works, Bohn Ed., II., 51.

Lycidas to that of *Paradise Lost;* the tone is identical in both poems. In the latter he says of Satan climbing over the walls of Eden,—

> So clomb this first grand thief into God's fold:
> So since into his Church lewd hirelings climb.
> (P. L., IV., 192–3.)

We may not find the uncompromising bitterness of this agreeable to our sense of propriety in these days when the church has become an institution of such decorum. In Milton's time gross corruptions existed, and were apparent, and it was far from his purpose to ignore or to condone them. Milton's indignation and wrath on account of these scandals was unbounded.*

While in matters of scholarship Milton was incomparably Cromwell's superior, and while there could be but slight interest on Cromwell's part in many of the poet's meditations and literary occupations, and while there was practically no bond of fellowship arising from these interests,—yet in all that concerned religious freedom and the Commonwealth of England, the Latin Secretary was in complete accord with his chief. There is no evidence, however, to show that the two men were friends or ever brought into intimate personal relations. Officially, Milton held but a humble position under the Commonwealth; Hume's quotation from Whitlocke, Lord

* "Milton's Italian journey brings out the two conflicting strains of feeling which were uttered together in *Lycidas,* the poet's impressibility by nature, the freeman's indignation at clerical domination." Mark Pattison, *Milton,* 39.

This was the same Milton who ten years before had stated the reason why he had not entered the church in accordance with his father's desire: "The church to whose service * * * I was destined as a child till * * * perceiving * * * that he who would take orders must subscribe slave * * * I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing." 1641.

Keeper of the Seal, is familiar, in which he speaks of "One Milton," as he calls him, "a blind man, who was employed in translating a treaty with Sweden into Latin." *

Milton had enormous admiration and, I doubt not, liking for the Protector. A Puritan of the Puritans, how could he help loving one who gave such complete execution to that which they all so ardently desired? Cromwell, moreover, had his amiable side; we know that his army and his officers loved him, and his letters to his daughter reveal solicitude and warm affection. Though stern and unrelenting in the performance of his duty as it appeared to him, still was he very human indeed, and the union of sensibility and of Puritanism, while our age may scoff at the combination, was dear to the poet's heart.† Whether or not the poet was intimate with Cromwell, it was his supreme good fortune to share the labours and counsels of the most masterful spirit of his age; he was storing away in his mind rich material from which to draw when, in blindness and solitude, after the heat and turmoil of the fray, he was to resume that occupation which had always been regarded by him as the master purpose of his life.

In *Paradise Lost* the poet has presented in convincing lineaments the portrait of a statesman in the person of Beelzebub:

> Than whom,
> Satan except, none higher sat, with grave
> Aspect he rose, and in his rising seemed

* Hume, Chapter LXIII. This humble functionary was as yet unknown, except to his immediate associates and to a limited circle of scholars.

† There is a convincing note of sincerity in the letter to his daughter Bridget, a young matron of twenty-two, recently the bride of his general, Ireton.

"Dear Heart, press on; let not Husband, let not anything cool thy affec-

A pillar of state; deep on his front engraven
Deliberation sat and public care;
And princely counsel in his face yet shone.
* * * Sage he stood,
With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
The weight of mightiest monarchies; his look
Drew audience and attention still as night
Or summer's noontide air.

(P. L., II., 299–309.)

This likeness is not lacking in traits of grandeur, but when it comes to dramatic expression in language befitting a great commander, it is Satan himself that most nearly presents a reflex of the great Protector:

He above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower.

(P. L., I., 589–91.)

The fallen Archangel is about to undertake the hazardous journey from Hell to the new-created Earth, and does not hesitate with exalted station to accept responsibility. He speaks in downright Cromwellian fashion as the born leader of men:

"But I should ill become this throne, O Peers,
And this imperial sovranty, adorned
With splendour, armed with power, if aught proposed
And judged of public moment, in the shape
Of difficulty or danger, could deter
Me from attempting. Wherefore do I assume

tions after Christ. I hope he [thy husband] will be an occasion to inflame them. That which is best worthy to love in thy Husband is that of the image of Christ he bears. Look on that, and love it best, and all the rest for that. I pray for thee, and him; do so for me." Letter to Bridget Ireton, October 25, 1646. Carlyle's *Cromwell*, I., 229.

These royalties, and not refuse to reign,
Refusing to accept as great a share
Of hazard as of honour, due alike
To him who reigns, and so much to him due
Of hazard more, as he above the rest
High honoured sits?"

(P. L., II., 445–56.)

The sonnet to Vane forms the third of those which, by reason of their republican tone, were not published with Milton's other poems after the Restoration, the year before the poet's death. This one had been printed anonymously in 1662 in a Life of Sir Henry Vane by George Sikes. The Sir Henry Vane,—

Vane, young in years, but in sage counsel old,—

to whom it was addressed, was at the time a member of the Council of State of forty-one members, in whom resided the real power of government, and he was also one of the Sub-committee for Foreign Affairs, consisting of six members, whom Milton served in the capacity of Latin Secretary. The poet sent him the sonnet on the third of July, 1652, when Vane was forty years of age; since his father was still alive, he was known as the "younger Vane."

It seems strange to speak of one of Milton's sonnets as addressed to an American, yet for a time Vane had been a resident of this country, if he were not so at this time. He came here with the younger Winthrop on his second voyage in 1635, "forsaking," Winthrop says, "the honours and preferments of the court, to enjoy the ordinances of Christ in their purity here." The Puritans came to America for "freedom to worship God";

they were convinced that they knew exactly what God wanted, and were determined that he should have nothing else. When Vane came to these shores, his father was a Privy Councillor and a Secretary of State to Charles I., one of the two or three most important men in political affairs in England at that time. Before the younger Vane, then twenty-three years of age, had been on this side of the water for nine months, the General Court of Massachusetts elected him Governor of the Commonwealth, as she called herself, already aspiring to a republican form of designation. Unfortunately, at a very critical period in the history of the Massachusetts colony, when the King who had granted it was already threatening the permanence of the charter on which were based all her hopes of independence, Vane became entangled in the controversy then active in the colony, on salvation by faith or works, and championed the cause of the famous Ann Hutchinson; in this being opposed by Winthrop and the Presbyterian ministers, who eventually succeeded in having the woman expelled from the colony. Ann Hutchinson believed in immediate revelations from on high,—an ever-recurring miracle, and a heresy hateful to Calvinists as savouring of Papist ideas, and as reflecting their belief in miracles which had occurred and were occurring since the time of Christ.

Vane contrived to stir up very heated opposition on account of his radical views, and left the colony in disgust after his failure to be reëlected Governor, and after he had been there less than two years. He became Minister for Foreign Affairs under Cromwell, and ten

years after the sonnet was written was beheaded by Charles II.*

Lord Clarendon's estimate of Vane is that he was by temperament a fanatic; like many of the time, he represented an advanced type of zealous enthusiasm in matters of religion. If this were madness, it was of a very noble sort; and when it took possession of a nation, or of an army, it made them well-nigh invincible, as those who stood up against Cromwell's Ironsides many times discovered to their cost.

Vane was an enthusiast and mystic and thought himself the inheritor of the sceptre of the millennial year. For Cromwell's estimate of the man, one may recall his words at the time of the dissolution of the Rump Parliament in April, 1653: "O Sir Henry Vane, Sir Henry Vane! the Lord deliver me from Sir Henry Vane!" uttered in the same breath with that historic outburst: "What shall we do with this Bauble? There, take it away!" But we must bear in mind that although Cromwell might then be impatient with his foibles, he was not unmindful as well of his sterling virtues, and had a genuine affection for the man. After the battle of Preston, in August, 1648, in a letter to his friend Oliver St. John, Cromwell bids him "remember my love to my dear brother H. Vane"; a phrase conceived in a mood of expansiveness not usual with the great soldier; one hardly recalls in the whole long series of letters, to any one outside of the circle of those directly connected with

* In 1662, the Lieutenant of the Tower records "that yesterday Sir H. Vane had a full hearing at the King's Bench, and is found guilty; and that he did never hear any man argue more simply than he in all his life, and so others say." Pepys's *Diary*, June 7, 1662.

him by blood and marriage, his calling any one else "dear brother."* What is of chief interest to us is that Milton should have awarded to him such exceedingly high praise:

> Vane, young in years, but in sage counsel old,
> Than whom a better senator ne'er held
> The helm of Rome, when gowns, not arms, repelled
> The fierce Epirot and the African bold;
> * * * * *
> On thy firm hand Religion leans
> In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son.

The poet specifies five acts of service which Vane has rendered to the State, and it is interesting to note what particular traits he selects for praise. Rome had never a better senator, he informs us,—

> (1) Whether to settle peace, or (2) to unfold
> The drift of hollow states [Holland perhaps]
> hard to be spelled;
> Then to advise (3) how War may, best upheld,
> Move by her two main nerves, iron and gold,
> In all her equipage; besides to know
> (4) Both spiritual power and (5) civil,
> what each means,
> What severs each, thou hast [thou'st] learned,
> which few have done.
> The bounds of either sword to thee we owe.

The three sonnets to Fairfax, Cromwell and Vane present, as no other portion of his entire poetic work

* Carlyle's *Cromwell*, II., 45. Again, after the battle of Dunbar he says in a touching letter to his wife, September 4, 1650: "The particulars of our late success Harry Vane or Gilbert Pickering will impart to thee." Vane was one of his intimates.

does, certain characteristics of the man which are apparent in his prose.*

Milton was following close in the footsteps of Spenser when he composed the sonnets addressed to the statesmen of his times; one has but to compare the following, addressed to Lord Burleigh, found among the eighteen sonnets which precede the *Faerie Queene:*

To you, right noble Lord, whose careful brest
To menage of most grave affairs is bent;
And on whose mightie shoulders most doth rest
The burden of this kingdom's government,
As the wide compasse of the firmament
On Atlas mightie shoulders is upstayd,
Unfitly I these ydle rimes present,
The labour of lost time, and wit unstayd:
Yet if their deeper sence be inly wayd
And the dim vele, with which from commune vew
Their fairer parts are hid, aside be layd,
Perhaps not vaine they may appear to you.
Such as they be, vouchsafe them to receave,
And wipe their faults out of your censure grave.

XV

When Milton wrote his famous sonnet *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont,* three years after the preceding, it is not impossible that his mind was dwelling again on the theme of *Paradise Lost.* His nephew tells us that three years later than this he was continuously at work

* Here may be detected some slight echo of that endowment which made Channing say of him:

"To many he seems only a poet, when in truth he was a profound scholar, a man of vast compass of thought, imbued thoroughly with all ancient and modern learning, and able to master, to mould, to impregnate with his own intellectual power, his great and various acquisitions." W. E. Channing, *The Poetical Genius of Milton.*

upon it, and, as we have seen, he had long since written a certain passage, now found in the Fourth Book of that poem, which was intended as a portion of a tragedy on the same theme.

One does not maintain that the same feeling pervades this sonnet which is the life and atmosphere of *Paradise Lost;* that is primarily and above all else a work of the imagination, a poem wherein are marshalled those varied traits of imagery which, united, produce their impressive effect of sublimity, and which combine in themselves the richness and grandeur, the manifold qualities of distinction, which a world's epic should possess; the sonnet is the expression of powerful feeling, clothed in simple, homely words. This may at least be said of it without exaggeration: the sonnet is the product of Milton's genius at the height of its powers, and is in every way worthy of the mind that was so soon to evolve in its intricate simplicity, in its grand and unconfused proportions, the poem of *Paradise Lost.*

The event which roused Milton to this "trumpet blast" of wrath, to the solemn invoking of God's anger against the offenders, was the massacre of three hundred innocent men, women and children of the people known as Vaudois, or Waldenses, living high up in the Alpine valleys of Piedmont in Italy. The Vaudois were poor peasants, a few thousand in number, who from time immemorial had, in spite of persecution, refused to comply with the demands of the Roman Catholic Church. They were "Protestants" long before the Reformation; it was even claimed that they had maintained in unbroken tradition the practices of primitive Christianity from the times of the Apostles, and for this reason they were

peculiarly dear to all Protestant countries when the atrocious crime of which they were now the victims was committed. This was the people,—

> Who kept [God's] truth so pure of old,
> When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones.

Their valleys were a part of the possessions of the Duke of Savoy, and, by the leniency of the House of Savoy, this humble folk had been somewhat spared for several generations from marked persecution. The present Duke, on the attainment of his majority, determined to bring them into the church. Catholic friars were sent among them, one of whom was killed; whereupon the edict went forth from the Court of Turin that the entire population of nine of their communes should within three days, unless they pledged themselves to enter the Roman Catholic Church within twenty days thereafter, remove to five of their communes situated higher up in the Alps, an act in itself of great cruelty since these Alpine valleys at this season of the year were cold and forbidding. Remonstrance to the Court was in vain, and toward the end of April, still a time of snow in the Alps, the threat was put into execution.* A body of troops sufficient for the purpose, a part of them Irish mercenaries,—of course good Catholics and of none too tender sensibilities,—was sent among them, and for eight days everything that hatred and resistance could inspire, or brutal cruelty and lust suggest, was wreaked on the helpless villagers. Many were killed, others were

* Carlyle is in error when he says of the time of the massacre that "the month was December" (*Cromwell,* V., 117); it actually occurred between the seventeenth and twenty-fourth of April, 1655. See Masson's summary of events, *Life of Milton,* V., 38 seq.

dragged away in chains; their only safety was in flight higher up the mountains, where, without food or sufficient shelter, great hardship was suffered. A circular letter from the representatives of these poor people was addressed to the Protestant Powers of Europe, and the news of the massacre reached England a month later. None felt the calamity more acutely than Cromwell, who said that it came as "near his heart as if his own nearest and dearest had been concerned."

A day of humiliation was appointed, and by the order of the Lord Protector a very considerable sum for their relief was collected throughout England and Wales, Cromwell himself giving from his private purse a sum equivalent to seven thousand five hundred pounds of the money of our day.* The matter became one of chief importance in the Council, and Milton drew up in Latin no less than seven letters: to the Duke of Savoy, the King of France, the Swiss Cantons, the King of Sweden, and others, invoking aid and demanding redress.

This whole awful incident of the massacre in Piedmont for many reasons appealed with peculiar force to Milton's sympathies. We may recall that the most intimate friendship of his youth had been that with the young physician, Charles Diodati, who was of Italian birth, and this circumstance had been of vital influence in quickening his interest in the Italian tongue and in all things pertaining to the country where it is spoken. His journey to Italy had naturally strengthened his interest in things Italian, so that having vividly in his mind both the land and its people, the massacre of this little group

* The total amount collected would be equal to £137,000 of our money. Masson, V., 41.

of primitive Christians wounded his dearest sensibilities. The matter necessarily came before him in all its details in his official capacity as scribe to the Council.

It was the duty of the English Secretary to the Council of State to write the foreign despatches, which were then rendered into the language of diplomatic correspondence by the Latin Secretary. But in several of these papers the hand of Milton is easily recognized. With his mind full of the subject, and with interest and emotions aroused, he naturally sought expression for profound feeling in verse. The result was that he then composed what is certainly one of the most magnificent sonnets in the English language, which may fitly be characterized in the poet's own words: this was indeed the "precious life-blood of a master spirit." *

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese, that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learnt thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

His wrath is so kindled that the words pour forth in impetuous torrent.† Mr. Mark Pattison's analysis of

* *Areopagitica.*

† It is characteristic of the quick flow of the verse that in the sixth and seventh lines the poet has omitted the verb: "Forget not those that [were]

what constitutes the peculiar excellence of this sonnet is discriminating: "With what homely materials is the effect produced! Not only is there not a single purple patch in the wording, but of thought, or image, all that there is is a borrowed thought, and one repeatedly borrowed, viz., Tertullian's saying, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.' * * * With a familiar quotation for its only thought, and with diction almost below ordinary, its forceful flood of suppressed passion sweeps along the hackneyed biblical phrases of which it is composed, just as a swollen river rolls before it the worn pebbles long ago brought down from the mountain side. From this sonnet one may learn that the poetry of a poem is lodged somewhere else than in its matter, or its thoughts, or its imagery, or its words. Our heart is here taken by storm, but not by any of these things. The poet hath breathed on us, and we have received his inspiration."*

The excellence of this sonnet lies truly in something else than poetic idea or grandeur of diction; if Wordsworth's characterization of poetry be correct, this exactly fulfils its requirements,—it is a "spontaneous outburst of powerful emotion." He may well have had this sonnet in mind when he said of Milton,—

in their ancient fold slain by the bloody Piemontese." There is a similar omission in the nineteenth sonnet: "Though my soul [be] more bent To serve therewith my Maker."

* Mark Pattison, *The Sonnets of John Milton*, 59–60.

Landor's appreciation is always of weight:

"*Porson.* [Milton has composed] a magnificent psalm of his own in the form of a sonnet.

Southey. You mean on the massacre of the Protestants in Piedmont? This is indeed the noblest of sonnets.

Porson. There are others in Milton comparable to it, but none elsewhere." Landor, *Southey and Porson; Imaginary Conversations*, III., 56.

> In his hand
> The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew
> Soul-animating strains—alas, too few!

Whether the sonorous ring of its verse is suggested most happily by likening it to the trumpet blast, or whether it approach not nearer to the grand organ roll, whose music is heard, sometimes in faint undertone, again in overpowering volume, surging and resounding through the mighty verse of *Paradise Lost*,—of this there can be no question, that in its limited compass echo "the solemn and divine harmonies of music."

It is a satisfaction to know that Cromwell's remonstrance and the forcible presentation of the case in Milton's letters were not without effect. The Duke of Savoy was forced to withdraw his cruel edict, and a treaty was formed by which the Vaudois were permitted for the time to continue in the exercise of their religious freedom. But, alas! the poor Piedmontese saw not an end to their persecutions. Three years later we find further correspondence from the Lord Protector to Louis XIV., "Most serene and potent Prince, most close Friend and Ally": one of Milton's letters. The Latin pulses and vibrates with intensity, reminding one of the sonnet which we have just read; fortunately we have it in Carlyle's translation.* "The terms of the Peace were settled in your Town of Pignerol; hard terms; but such as those poor People, indigent and wretched, after suffering all manner of cruelties and atrocities, might gladly acquiesce in; if only, hard and unjust as the bargain is, it

* *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, V., 152 seq.

were adhered to. It is not adhered to: those terms are broken; the purport of every one of them is, by false interpretation and various subterfuges, eluded and violated. Many of these People are ejected from their Old Habitations; their native Religion is prohibited to many: new taxes are exacted; a new fortress has been built over them, out of which soldiers frequently sallying plunder or kill whomsoever they meet. * * *

"Which now, O Most Christian King, I beseech and obtest thee, by thy right-hand which pledged a league and Friendship with us, by the sacred honour of that Title of most christian,—permit not to be done: nor let such license of savagery, I do not say to any Prince (for indeed no cruelty like this could come into the mind of any Prince, much less into the tender years of that young Prince, or into the woman's heart of his mother), but to those most accursed Assassins, be given."

Space forbids the quotation of the entire letter, but it is, as we might expect, most eloquent, and presents the claims of these poor Alpine peasants in very convincing form. "Remember that these very People became subjects of thy Ancestor, Henry, most friendly to Protestants. * * * The instrument of that their Paction and Surrender is yet extant in the Public Acts of your Kingdom in which this among other things is specified and provided against, that these People of the Valleys should not therefore be delivered over to any one except on the same conditions under which thy invincible Ancestor had received them into fealty." Therefore Oliver, by Milton's hand, now urges Louis to effect an exchange of territory with the Duke of Savoy by which

the Piedmontese might be brought under the protection of the French flag.

Milton's letter was supported and supplemented by one from the Lord Protector himself to the English Ambassador to the French Court. Oliver states all the points to be negotiated explicitly and with force.

Soon after this correspondence came the fall of Dunkirk, and Turenne's victory, effected by English aid. Doubtless the French monarch, as requested, took measures to prevent fresh massacres: "Their grievances were again 'settled,' scared away for a season, by negotiation." *

XVI

THE sonnets to Cromwell, Vane, and on the massacre in Piedmont were all written after Milton's blindness; that *On his Blindness,* in the same year as the last of these. It is the meditation of a wise man schooling himself to adversity; not a sound of repining do we hear in the presence of almost overwhelming misfortune, such as the moan echoing in the *Agonistes,*—

> "O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
> Without all hope of day!"
>
> (S. A., 80–2.)

Only the lament here of a strong man that his voice of song has not been raised in the service of God,—since, as Milton believed, God is best served by the faithful exercise of those talents which he has given, to one five,

* Carlyle, *Cromwell,* V., 159.

to another two, to another one; to every man according to his several ability.

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."

The note of the sonnet is patience and Christian resignation:

Who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best.

As in the second of the sonnets addressed to Cyriack Skinner, he reveals his undaunted courage; in spite of all, he is able to,—

Still bear up and steer
Right onward.

The spirit of his maturity was consistent with that of his youth, but we no longer hear of that incentive which then urged him on to relentless effort and untiring preparation. After his college days, and before the Italian journey, we catch a glimpse of the motives that guided him, and although the words are found in the elegy on

the death of Edward King and refer to him, yet the underlying sentiment springs involuntarily from his own breast, and is the expression of his own determination:

> Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
> (That last infirmity of noble mind)
> To scorn delights and live laborious days.
>
> (Lycidas, 70–2.)

Then Phœbus, to console the shepherd as he repines over the uncertainties of life, instils into his mind the consolation of a fame higher than that of mortal birth:

> "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
> Nor in the glistering foil
> Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,
> But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
> And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
> As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
> Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed."
>
> (Lycidas, 78–84.)

In both youth and age, so far as the regulation of his own personal conduct was concerned, the one thing of all that seemed to him the best worth while was—

> To scorn delights and live laborious days.

XVII

THE sonnet under consideration and the second of those to Cyriack Skinner, also on the theme of his blindness, are biographically of peculiar interest. The great misfortune of blindness, which was to wrap him in solitude,—"from the cheerful ways of men Cut off,"—a disaster that to one of less courageous temperament

might well have proved overwhelming, had been coming on for ten years, and was now complete in his forty-fifth year. The Latin Secretary had received ample warning from his physicians that he must not continue to use his eyes, but in spite of the injunction had deliberately proceeded with the *Defensio Secunda,* feeling it his duty to aid the cause of Liberty so far as it lay in his power, whatever the result to himself might be.

It is not impossible that in a double sense we are indebted to his blindness for the existence of *Paradise Lost* itself. To begin with, the very vividness of the scenes depicted there we owe in no slight degree to the infirmity of a blind man, who could summon before his inner vision the celestial city and the imaginary characters of his poem with no distracting pictures of the world about him. All was excluded except the radiant fields of his imagination; they were more real than the world itself in which he lived. In addition to this, the very circumstance that he was blind and "In disgrace with fortune and men's eyes" helped without doubt to shield him from the wrath of the avenging judges after the Restoration, and before *Paradise Lost* was written. Why Milton should have escaped death among the regicides has always remained somewhat of a mystery. It is known, however, that he had powerful friends in Parliament, and that every care was taken by them to avert this catastrophe; the thing seems to have been managed with no slight skill. In particular, the poet Andrew Marvell, whom Milton had formerly recommended to Cromwell as his own assistant Latin Secretary, did all that he could in his behalf; others, to whom his name was not un-

known as that of poet and scholar in an age when scholarship was still reverenced, came to his aid.

When Milton was finally released from the custody of the Sergeant-at-Arms, after the passage of the Indemnity Bill, a certain Colonel King was one of the two members of Parliament who seconded Marvell's motion for an inquiry as to whether the fees charged by the Sergeant-at-Arms were not in his case excessive. It is not impossible that this Colonel Edward King was a relative of that Edward King in whose honour *Lycidas* had been composed. It would be no slight satisfaction to know with certainty that this was the case, and that representatives of Edward King's family did at this time make an effort to repay so far as they were able the enormous obligation they were under for the distinction conferred upon their name,—a distinction which will endure as long as English literature itself. Whatever political interest was enlisted in his behalf, the fact that he was blind must have had its influence in averting prosecution, since it has never been a British trait to strike an adversary when he is down.* Although Parliament, after the Restoration, failed to keep faith with the Puritans in accordance with the Declaration made at Breda by Charles II., yet this Parliament was composed in large part of English gentlemen, and it is not impossible that they might condone the escape of one who was both blind and, so far as they could see, insignificant.

* Milton did not, however, get off quite unscathed; besides the fees, to which reference has been made, due to the Sergeant-at-Arms, he was mulcted in not less than two thousand pounds, a sum equivalent to more than three times that amount to-day, and the loss of which robbed his later years in no slight degree of reasonable ease and comfort. While these years were not exactly spent in poverty, the margin which separated them from such estate was but narrow.

His blindness thus served to protect him, and as well it opened to his inward eye celestial scenes. That the imaginative vision of the blind is more vivid than that of other men is well known. The poet speaks of one in blindness,—

> With inward eyes illuminated;
>
> (S. A., 1689.)

and in his youth he had written to Diodati of—

> Tiresias, wiser for his loss of sight.*

We have ample evidence that Milton was assured in his own mind of his increased endowment:

> "[He] closed mine eyes.
> Mine eyes he closed, but open left the cell
> Of fancy, my internal sight."
>
> (P. L., VIII., 459–61.)

To that imaginative power, so augmented, are we indebted for the master works of his genius.

All of Milton's faculties were unconsciously gathering and solidifying and ordering themselves for the supreme effort of *Paradise Lost*.

> They also serve who only stand and wait,

says the man whose "unpremeditated verse,"—

> Unmeditated; such prompt eloquence
> Flowed from [his] lips, in prose or numerous verse,
> More tuneable than needed lute or harp
> To add more sweetness;
>
> (P. L., V., 149–52.)

* Elegy VI., Cowper's translation.

whose verse in two or three years was to flow in the mighty current of *Paradise Lost;* whose hand was to strike with ease and with firmness those heroic chords, as only two, or three, or four men, in the whole history of the world, have succeeded in doing; in sympathy with which every man that reads, feels himself dignified, and ennobled, and taught infinite lessons of courage and of proud humility.

Similar to the sonnet which we have been considering, and also on the theme of his blindness, is the second of those addressed to Cyriack Skinner, who was of the little band of young men, one of whom daily read and walked with him; it was written on the third anniversary of the day on which at last he became totally blind.*

> Cyriack, this three years' day these eyes, though clear,
> To outward view, of blemish or of spot,
> Bereft of light, their seeing have forgot;
> Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear
> Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,
> Or man, or woman.

With harmless vanity he assures his friend that blindness has not spoiled his good looks. In the *Defensio Secunda* we have the poet's own account of his eyes: "They are externally uninjured; they shine with a clear, unclouded light, just like the eyes of those whose vision is most acute." †

Like enough to be a continuation of the sonnet are

* March, 1653.

† St. John's translation, P. W., IV., 267.

Milton apparently inherited his weak eyes from his mother, who, Aubrey informs us, used spectacles "presently after she was thirty years old." "His father read without spectacles at 84." The following passage is from the manuscript notes left by John Aubrey, the antiquary of Oxford, for a brief Life of the poet: "Of middle stature. He had light brown, abroun,

the lines of the Third Book of *Paradise Lost,* which are almost exactly of the requisite length of a sonnet and are conceived in a mood not unfitted for expression in sonnet form, and may almost be divided into octave and sestet; the latter verses, moreover, being of a reflective tone appropriate to this form of verse:

> Seasons return; but not to me returns
> Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
> Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
> Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
> But clouds instead and ever-during dark
> Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
> Cut off, and, for the book of knowledge fair,
> Presented with a universal blank
> Of Nature's works, to me expunged and rased,
> And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
>
> So much the rather thou, celestial Light,
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.
>
> (P. L., III., 41–55.)

The sonnet to Cyriack Skinner continues Milton-like; in nothing that he wrote do we see the fibre of his character more plainly shown than here:

> Yet I argue not
> Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
> Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer
> Right onward.*

hair. His complexion exceeding fayre. He was so fayre that they called him the Lady of Xt. Coll. Ovall face, his eie a darke gray." Aubrey says elsewhere: "Extreme pleasant in his conversation, and at dinner, supper, etc., but satyrical. He pronounced the letter R very hard,—*Litera canina,* a certain signe of a satyrical wit. (From Jo. Dryden.)"

* In line 8, the phrase to "bear up" is capable of ambiguous meaning; in

The restoration of Charles II. to the English throne was to take place in less than five years. That restoration, to Milton, was to be the shattering of his dearest hopes. The work for which in his youth he had so carefully trained himself, and to which all his powers were bent, still unperformed; himself in hopeless blindness, in poverty, in hiding, in disgrace, and almost in the presence of old age; alone, his second wife dead after fifteen months of happy married life (the more pleasing in contrast with the griefs and disappointments of his first marriage)—such a life to another might well have seemed failure indeed! Yet the most sympathetic admirer of Milton, and the most unreserved republican, may be pardoned if he rejoice in the service which Charles II. unwittingly rendered to the cause of civilization, perhaps the greatest service that he rendered at all, the setting free of the man John Milton from unprofitable tasks to write *Paradise Lost,* even if the causes which produced that liberation were apparently misfortunes to the man, and for a time postponed Democracy in England and the achievement of those ideals for which Cromwell lived and for which the Commonwealth had been created.

The ending of this sonnet shows that he had no doubt in regard to the value of the service which he was rendering to the cause of liberty. He is still referring to his eyes, now completely deprived of sight:

> What supports me, dost thou ask?
> The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied

nautical parlance it signifies "to take one's course toward" an object, and is here used in conjunction with the other similar phrase, to "steer right onward." (Verity, *Milton's Sonnets,* 58.)

In Liberty's defence, my noble task,
Of which all Europe talks from side to side.
This thought might lead me through the world's vain mask
Content, though blind, had I no better guide.*

XVIII

THE ending of the sonnet is conceived in a mood of Christian meekness, as different as possible from the dramatic rendering of Satan in *Paradise Lost,* who through pride and envy was cast with his followers from Heaven; yet does the dramatic presentation of Satan in certain aspects express a similar aspiration. The attitude of mind in which this character is conceived, and the action in which he is involved, are also a plea for liberty, and consequently have held the sympathies of mankind even when the didactic justice of the Creator, as expounded in the poem, has left them unmoved or, what is worse still,—themselves rebellious and estranged.

There is an incident in the early life of the poet, which, if taken in conjunction with this which we have been considering, is not lacking in significance. When Milton was on his way home from Italy, in June, 1639, he wrote in the album of his host at Geneva a quotation from *Comus,* and beneath it the adaptation of a line from Horace:

Coelum, non animum, muto, dum trans mare curro.†

* In the twelfth line Masson, in his edition of the Minor Poems, reads "rings" instead of "talks," which he is not justified in doing. The Cambridge manuscript has "talks"; this was changed by Philips to "rings." He probably had in mind the first line of Sonnet XV:

Fairfax, whose name in arms through Europe rings.

† Coelum non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt.
Ep. I., ii. 27.

There seemed to him then, as all his life long, nothing more desirable for a rational man to possess than inflexible will and a constant mind. When, long afterwards, in the exuberance of imagination, he came to depict the fallen Archangel, he gave of the very choicest in his own soul, perhaps in more generous measure than he himself was quite aware of, and unconsciously, it may be even in spite of himself, he endowed the fallen Angel with his own unswerving ideals. Almost the first word of Lucifer to the heavenly host, after their fall, when they had finally recovered sufficient strength to lift themselves from the "fiery gulf," and to stand upon "the firm brimstone," "the burning marle,"—is the exact echo of the words recorded by Milton in his fervid youth:

"Nor * * do I [he says] repent, or change
* * * * that fixéd mind."
(P. L., I., 96–7.)

A little after this their chief reminds his followers of their one dearest possession, still their own, even if in Hell,—

"The unconquerable will,
* * * * *
And courage never to submit or yield,"—
(P. L., I., 106–8.)

a will not only unsubdued but beyond subjection! Let us, he says to his companion, Beelzebub—

"Consult * * * *
What reinforcement we may gain from hope
If not what resolution from despair."
(P. L., I., 187–91.)

Then follows that noble passage which is but the echo of the poet's own youthful resolution:

"Hail,
Infernal world! And thou, profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor, one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time."
(P. L., I., 250–3.)

If they must accept defeat, they will do it as downright Cromwellians,—like the Ironsides on the eve of Dunbar,—

Firm and unmoved
With dread of death to flight or foul retreat.
(P. L., I., 554–5.)

Never stronger than in the presence of untoward fortune:

"To bow and sue for grace
With suppliant knee, and deify his power
Who, from the terror of this arm, so late
Doubted his empire,—that were low indeed;
That were an ignominy and shame beneath
This downfall."
(P. L., I., 111–116.)

Beelzebub, "his bold compeer,"—

One next himself in power, and next in crime,
(P. L., I., 79.)

replies with determination which is only a reflection of his own God-derived obstinacy,—

"The mind and spirit remains
Invincible."
(P. L., I., 139–40.)

The true Miltonic note is heard in the leader's rejoinder:

"Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,
Doing or suffering."
(P. L., I., 157–8.)

His followers respond with eagerness—how could they else?—to the inspiration of his courage:

> Thus they,
> Breathing united force with fixéd thought,
> Moved on in silence to soft pipes that charmed
> Their painful steps o'er the burnt soil.
> (P. L., I., 559–62.)

A further appeal is made to our sympathies by the fact here brought out that before the revolt of the archangels it was not fully known and accepted beyond all possible question, that the Ruler of Heaven was omnipotent; a circumstance of the drama which is sometimes overlooked. Even God himself, in taking counsel with the Son, vicegerent of his might, admits to him that,—

> "Nearly it now concerns us to be sure
> Of our omnipotence. * * *
> Let us advise, and to this hazard draw
> With speed what force is left, and all employ
> In our defence, lest unawares we lose
> This our high place, our sanctuary, our hill."
> (P. L., V., 721–32.)

That does not seem the utterance of one who was absolutely impregnable, invulnerable, omnipotent. The inference is obvious, that without an exercise of care their own dynasty might be impaired or overthrown. If God himself be constrained to admit contingency of defeat, who can blame Lucifer for sharing the opinion of his Chief? In the Archangel's address to the army following his standard he says,—

> "But he, who reigns
> Monarch in Heaven, till then as one secure

> Sat on his throne, upheld by old repute,
> Consent or custom."
>
> (P. L., I., 637–40.)

In spite of all his magnificence the angels had as yet no positive knowledge based upon experience that their mighty Ruler was all-powerful and irresistible. Previously to this Beelzebub had glanced at the same ignorance on the part of the fallen angels, by implication asserting that he himself was unaware at the time of God's full strength:

> "But what if he our conqueror (whom I now
> Of force believe almighty, since no less
> Than such could have o'erpowered such force as ours)," etc.
>
> (P. L., I., 143–5.)

Of course one must receive with a certain degree of mental reservation any communications between Lucifer and Beelzebub; their evidence is necessarily tainted by self-interest and by resentment caused by recent events in Heaven, and may be accepted as of weight only when confirmed by that of some one in whom we have unimpaired confidence. When this evidence however coincides, as here, with the admissions of God himself, one can no longer refuse to give it serious consideration.

Without question the devout Calvinist of that day to the plea of Beelzebub would instantly have replied that ignorance of the law is no defense to him who has committed crime; but in the two centuries and a half which have elapsed since this poem was composed the religious conviction of the Anglo-Saxon race has ripened and matured,—the people of that time would doubtless have said that it has since progressed an appreciable degree

toward deterioration, perhaps decay; but we of this day, —owing no small part of our enlightenment to Milton himself, and although living in an age far from spiritual, —have grasped one idea of deep significance, to which the people of that time could not attain, that there are laws of spirit which the literal interpretation of the written word serves only to thwart and nullify and to render of no avail.

In a later book Satan is made to admit that he was created by God, and owes all to him, and that, from the first, he knew God to be omnipotent; but there is an element of contradiction here. It is not impossible that the fallen angel may, the least bit in the world, have lost somewhat of his fighting edge when he could bring himself to make this admission, though we may be sure that he himself would be the last person in the world (for he was then in the world) to confess that such was the case. We know that when the "two strong angels," appointed by Gabriel as a guard around the bower of our first parents, discovered Satan there, in the form of a toad, whispering soft nothings into the ear of Eve, one of them, Zephon, taunted him with this very thing, at least in its outward and visible aspects:

> "Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same,
> Or undiminished brightness, to be known
> As when thou stood'st in Heaven upright and pure."
> (P. L., IV., 835–7.)

The exuberance of the dawn is reflected in the opening passages of *Paradise Lost,* and the poet in them has revealed his own courage and steadfast determination to do or die. The reader's sympathy is aroused for im-

mortal spirits punished on account of loyalty to their chief, and is equally aroused in the behalf of one who, if actuated by envy, pride and ambition, yet was a consistent rebel, was strong, and was loyal,—almost the noblest virtue of them all,—and who hated the arbitrary exercise of authority. Certainly, Americans, who would not exist except that Englishmen beyond the seas believed in the divine origin of Rebellion, rather than to suffer wrongs unworthy of Englishmen, must acclaim such virtues even if found in Hell. Where they exist is not altogether Hell; a gleam of hope and of celestial light irradiates the gloom.

We have no reason to doubt that Milton started to compose his epic at its beginning, and slowly progressed, with slight exceptions perhaps, step by step to the end. Thus, in a certain way, the early books may be considered as the youth of that heroic poem, and they possess the attributes of youth, its exuberance and abounding vitality,—particularly this glorious first book has a quality of promise, and of newly awakened hope and purpose, which are the divine attributes of youth. Generations of our blood have responded to the enthusiasm of these opening chapters, and will respond long after our callous age has ceased to exist and, so far as creative poetry is considered, has become but an insignificant portion of the Past.

Any adequate study of the character of Satan would take us far afield, but it is well known that some of the noblest and most generous traits of Milton's temperament are shown in the portrayal of the Archfiend. If the poet in the sonnet reveals the firmness of his own mind,—

> Yet I argue not
> Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
> Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer
> Right onward,—

Satan echoes the sentiment in words of moral elevation equalling his own,

> "The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
> What matter where, if I be still the same?"
>
> (P. L., I., 254–6.)

In *Paradise Lost* the poet never allows us to forget that the leader of the infernal hosts is an angel, one that has known the beatitudes of Heaven, and who still retains somewhat of divine sensibility. When he first sees the newly created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden he is rapt in admiration, deeming them little inferior to Heavenly Spirits bright,—

> "Whom my thoughts pursue
> With wonder, and could love;
> * * * * *
> Whom I could pity thus forlorn,
> Though I unpitied."
>
> (P. L., IV., 362–75.)

He, too, was a "Heavenly Spirit bright" and one whose breeding betrays his celestial origin. His punishment is not merely physical degradation and torture, but is as well exquisite suffering of spirit,—

> The thought
> Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
> Torments him.
>
> (P. L., I., 54–5.)

When he brings himself to address his cohorts for the first time after they have left the "burning lake," and their ranks have been formed,—

> Attention held them mute.
> Thrice he assayed, and thrice, in spite of scorn,
> Tears, such as Angels weep, burst forth.
> (P. L., I., 618–20.)

And again, in a later passage of the poem he is the victim of remorse,—

> Now conscience wakes despair
> That slumbered; wakes the bitter memory
> Of what he was, what is, and what must be
> Worse;
> (P. L., IV., 23–6.)

and a little further on we are informed of his contrite spirit, a mood genuine if of short duration,—

> Abashed the Devil stood,
> And felt how awful goodness is, and saw
> Virtue in her shape how lovely, saw and pined
> His loss.
> (P. L., IV., 846–9.)

Even the meek and altogether adorable Eve, when she is about to eat of the forbidden fruit, communes with herself in words which are the expression of the poet's own temperament and conviction, and which have been put in her mind by the Archfiend himself. The temptation of Eve is so subtly contrived that no one with a single trait of nobleness in his composition, no one in whose soul a gleam of godhead still survives, could fail to act precisely as she did. To sin thus was not,—in the

eyes of her descendants who still possess a particle of generosity,—to sin thus was not to sin at all:

> "In plain then, what forbids he but *to know?*
> Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise!
> Such prohibitions bind not. But if death
> Bind us with after-bands, what profits then
> Our inward freedom?"
>
> (P. L., IX., 758–62.)

Instead of blame for our Mother we should have only gratitude and thanks, and to Satan must we yield the entire credit for her act. The character of Eve as conceived by Milton is dramatically correct; her trespass sprang from an impulse so deep as to be subconscious and instinctive, the inevitable expression of a mind fresh-moulded by the hand of God, created by his hand from the body and soul of one only a little lower than the angels.

The Greek intelligence evolved its myth of Prometheus and the theft of fire, the rape of divine and illuminating knowledge. With a sureness of intuition that one might naturally expect in this new-created child of God, she who plucked the apple knew that the real Paradise for her children lay in knowledge, in truth, and in the search after truth. In tears was accomplished this parturition of newly awakened aspiration. Fresh from the hand of God, with the seal of perfection upon her, Eve instantly seized for her children a fire more divine even than that which Prometheus brought to mankind concealed in the hollow of a reed. It may be that an enlightened Greek would have maintained that they were one and the same.

XIX

We now come to sonnets illustrating a very different phase of the poet's temperament. The other of the two sonnets addressed to Cyriack Skinner and the one to Lawrence could ill be spared in any treatment of his verse written during this period, which should present a well-rounded character, or give a correct estimate of the man.

The touches of humour in *Paradise Lost* are forbidding; more than once do the austerities of the Hebrew Jehovah yield place to the equally repellent and ungodlike derision of a Jove, looking at man's foibles to laugh at them, as where Raphael in the Eighth Book tells Adam that man's solution of the celestial motions will excite God's mirth:

> "The rest
> From Man or Angel the great Architect
> Did wisely to conceal, and not divulge
> His secrets, to be scanned by them who ought
> Rather admire. Or if they list to try
> Conjecture, he his fabric of the heavens
> Had left to their disputes, perhaps to move
> His laughter at their quaint opinions wide."
> (P. L., VIII., 71–8.)

In the last book, the confusion of tongues provokes God to merriment,—

> "Great laughter was in Heaven."
> (P. L., XII., 59.)

In the Fifth Book, he holds in contempt the revolt of Lucifer and the Sons of Morn, although they were his own created angels and a third part of the hosts of

Heaven, and had been, before the birth of his divine Heir,—which was a quite recent event,—his most favoured offspring and his delight. When the Almighty has decided to punish the rebellious angel, he turns smilingly to Gabriel,—the smile, not of mercy, but of irony. The plans of Satan, who had hoped to beguile and betray the Son of God, were about to miscarry, but the poet informs us that,—

> Contrary, unweeting, he fulfilled
> The purposed counsel, pre-ordained and fixed,
> Of the Most High, who in full frequence bright
> Of Angels, thus to Gabriel smiling spake.
>
> (P. R., I., 126–29.)

That smile is Hebraic, vindictive, cruel. Later, he declares his purpose to defy Satan to do his worst,—

> "This man * * I expose
> To Satan; let him tempt, and now assay
> His utmost subtlety."
>
> (P. R., I., 140–4.)

Only severe Puritanism and Calvinistic theology could so harden a poet's heart as to make him imagine the pleasure of the Creator in contemplating the infirmities of his creature. Milton in his prose makes mention of "grim laughter"; and of a certainty this of Jehovah is saturnine enough.

Again, in the Sixth Book, the derision of the heavenly hosts by Satan is hateful, although here in no way violating dramatic fitness:

> "So they among themselves in pleasant vein
> Stood scoffing."
>
> (P. L., VI., 628–9.)

In the Milton pamphlets are many passages which may well be characterized as conceived in a mood of "savage indignation,"—they are not hard to find,—and once in a Greek motto written by him to be placed beneath an engraved portrait which did not suit him, affixed as a frontispiece to the first edition of the minor poems, Milton concealed a bitter gibe, sanctioned by the usage of the time perhaps, but in itself a proceeding which would not now be permitted by social ethics, but would be condemned as an act of insincerity, almost of treachery; so do fashions change from age to age in regard to such matters.* Marshall, the engraver, had not been successful in rendering the poet's features, and this was a fault and dereliction that the latter could not quite regard with philosophic equanimity, since he was always somewhat vain of his personal appearance, and any trifling with his dignity it was not easy for him to condone. In this mood of irritation the poet composed a quatrain in Greek and handed it to the poor, deluded artist with the request that it be inscribed beneath the face on the engraved plate. There it will stand for all time as Milton's protest against this specific act of incompetency. For twenty-five years this was the only published likeness of the poet. In the *Pro se Defensio contra Alexandrum Morum,* Milton says in regard to this portrait, apparently with no repentance for his act: "I allowed myself to be clumsily engraved by an unskilful engraver, because there was not another in the city in that time of war." Masson thus translates the verse:

* The portrait is in an oval frame surrounded by the Muses of Tragic and of Lyric Poetry, of Astronomy and of History, and with a distant scene in miniature of shepherds dancing beneath the wood to the sound of the pipe.

That an unskilful hand had carved this print
You 'd say at once, seeing the living face;
But, finding here no jot of me, my friends
Laugh at the botching artist's mis-attempt.*

In the sonnets to which we have now come we see the amiable side of Milton, as nowhere else more fully. They are peculiarly agreeable, being conceived in a genial spirit, pleasing and dignified, and as far removed as possible from the tone of those poems and passages in prose wherein he attempts to give expression to a mood of irony or facetiousness:

Lawrence, of virtuous father virtuous son,
Now that the fields are dank, and ways are mire,
Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire
Help waste a sullen day, what may be won
From the hard season gaining? Time will run
On smoother, till Favonius reinspire
The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire
The lily and the rose, that neither sowed nor spun.
What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,
Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise
To hear the lute well touched, or artful voice
Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?
He who of these delights can judge, and spare
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.†

When Milton refers to the "lute" in this sonnet he has in mind the bass-viol, in the use of which both he and

* Masson's *Life of Milton*, III., 459.

† Compare the ending of the sonnet, as presenting a moral lesson unexpectedly following the graceful musings of the poet, with that of one of the Italian love sonnets:

Oh, were my sluggish heart and hard bosom,
As good a soil to him who plants from Heaven.
(IV. PATTISON'S TRANSLATION.)

Lawes were accomplished; one of the bonds of mutual interest which held them together.

The last two lines of the sonnet contain one of the most delightful of ambiguities, and one capable of quite opposite signification. Milton does not mean that the man is wise who will spare time to interpose these relaxations frequently; what he wishes to enforce is a sparing indulgence in festive repasts, though "of Attic taste." As for the profit to be derived from music, he always believed in that without any mental reservation whatever, as a fountain pure of refreshment and delight.

Richard Garnett has been happy in his characterization of this sonnet; "[It] gives," he says, "a pleasing picture of the British Homer in his Horatian hour"; it reveals a cordial side of Milton's nature and one of service to us in understanding his attractiveness to men much younger than himself.

The Lawrence to whom the sonnet was addressed was the son of Henry Lawrence, President of the Council under Cromwell, who had been one of Milton's pupils, and was now twenty-two years old,—Milton being of more than twice that age. When the poet offered this tribute of hospitality he was of course quite blind.

Milton's praise of wine, if fervent, is always discreet.*

* Aubrey in his manuscript notes for a *Life* of the poet says: "Temperate, rarely dranke between meales." The poet's nephew tells us of his uncle's severe regimen: "He himself giving an example to those under him * * * of hard study, and spare diet; only this advantage he had, that once in three weeks or a month, he would drop into the society of some young sparks of his acquaintance, the chief whereof were * * * two gentlemen of Gray's-Inn, the beau's of those times, but nothing near so bad as now-a-days; with these gentlemen he would so far make bold with his body, as now and then to keep a gawdy day." (Philips, *Life*, 365.) This must be taken *cum grano salis*, since it was the nephew's consuming passion to have all things elegant; the audience that he had in mind was

One recalls from Boswell Dr. Johnson's illuminative comment that "no part of *L'Allegro* is made to arise from the pleasures of the bottle," a remark seeming, it may be, somewhat deficient in precise grasp of that prevailing mood of ideality which characterizes this reverie of the Puritan poet. At all events, Johnson's comment was in keeping with the spirit of the time in which he wrote.* But Milton himself can on occasion laud "the sweet poison of misuséd wine":—when he speaks of the "cool crystálline" he does not, it is true, mean prophetically to signify with precision that exact wine of our own day to which the words might with fitness be applied,—but with generous praise he sings the virtues of—

> "The dancing ruby,
> Sparkling out-poured, the flavour or the smell,
> Or taste, that cheers the hearts of gods and men."
> (S. A., 543–5.)

He was not neglectful of its charm. In the entertainment offered by our first parents to Raphael the juice of the grape was offered to their guest, although the refreshment could have possessed but little virtue to cheer the hearts of gods or men. It was the "grape juice" of contemporary renown, a strictly temperance drink. Adorable Eve presents the cup,—

> Undecked save with herself, more lovely fair
> Than wood-nymph, or the fairest goddess,
> * * At table * *

the Court and the "sparks" of fashion; he is constrained to insist that they were "nothing near so bad as now-a-days." Oh, dear, no!

*"The chief value of criticism," it has been sagely observed, "is the light that it casts on the critic himself." Johnson in his latter days was himself far from intemperate; his biographer has recorded his utterance, pathetic for one of that day and generation: "The dog under the table is not more unacquainted with the taste of wine than I am."

Ministered naked, and their flowing cups
With pleasant liquors crowned.
(P. L., V., 380–1; 443–5.)

For drink the grape
She crushes, inoffensive must, and meaths
From many a berry.
(P. L., V., 344–6.)

Fermented wine they had not while in a state of innocence, but the fruit of "that forbidden tree" gave to our race, with all its senses unimpaired, its first exhilaration similar to that derived from "turbulent liquor":

Her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat:
* * Such delight till then, as seemed,
In fruit she never tasted. * * *
* * * Satiate at length,
And hightened as with wine, jocund and boon,
Thus to herself she pleasingly began, etc.
(P. L., IX., 780–94.)

Everything for the moment seemed interesting to her, and very much "worth while"!

In the Celestial City they had something bearing very close resemblance to good red wine, made from the fruit of the vine. Raphael informs Adam that in Heaven—

"The trees
Of life ambrosial fruitage bear, and vines
Yield nectar."
(P. L., V., 426–8.)

Whatever it was that they drank and delighted in, like our wine it was the product of the vine. Is it unfair to assume that it was not, as compared with our best

vintages, "more refined, more spiritous"? When the empyreal host of angels is gathering before the Almighty's throne to listen to his decree after the creation of the Son, and as night comes on, they are, as was fitting, regaled with a splendid collation,—tables piled with angels' food:

> "And rubied nectar flows
> In pearl, in diamond, and massy gold,
> Fruit of delicious vines, the growth of Heaven."
> (P. L., V., 633–5.)

The passage immediately following, a continuation of this, has an added interest from the fact that it is a fuller expansion in the second edition of that which was more briefly expressed in the first, so that it seems to be the deliberate expression of the poet's mind,—not of great moment in regard to this minute detail, but significant in relation to a theme of more far-reaching import:

> On flowers reposed, and with fresh flowerets crowned,
> They eat, they drink, and in communion sweet
> Quaff immortality and joy, secure
> Of surfeit where full measure only bounds
> Excess, before the all-bounteous King, who showered
> With copious hand, rejoicing in their joy.
> (P. L., V., 636–41.)

Milton scouted the idea that man's body, whether pure or impure, was simply the tabernacle inhabited by his spirit. He believed fully that man was one, body and soul, the delights of the two were interpenetrating, commingled, and interfused; and he believed that after death body and soul alike reposed, awaiting in sleep, almost in annihilation, the trump of the Last Judgment.

The poet has given us an illuminative word on this very point in the First Book of *Paradise Lost,* in that passage descriptive of the leader of the rebel host who, "at their great Emperor's call," aroused themselves from the brimstone lake. He is telling us of the identity of male and female spirits, this time of those evilly disposed, of Baalim and Astaroth—that is, of the male and female manifestations of the god Baal:

> For Spirits, when they please
> Can either sex assume, or both; so soft
> And uncompounded is their essence pure,
> Not tied or manacled with joint or limb,
> Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,
> Like cumbrous flesh; but, in what shape they choose,
> Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,
> Can execute their aery purposes,
> And works of love or enmity fulfil.
>
> (P. L., I., 423–31.)

This is consistent with his idea that the body is not merely a receptacle of the spirit, "the temple of the Holy Ghost." The vital principle of man is not merely a spirit constrained to accept for a brief space of time its tenancy in "this muddy vesture of decay"; his vigour is dependent on "the brittle strength of bones," and upon "cumbrous flesh," as well as upon energy of will and spiritual endowment; the two are so inextricably involved that soul deprived of body is doomed to that which is virtually the equivalent of non-existence until the call of the last trump shall summon body and soul alike to a new and ampler existence.

In the Sixth Book of *Paradise Lost* the poet returns to this theme. The sword of Michael in the conflict with

Lucifer has inflicted upon the Archangel a grievous wound:

> "Yet soon he healed; for Spirits, that live throughout
> Vital in every part—not, as frail man,
> In entrails, heart or head, liver or reins—
> Cannot but by annihilating die;
> Nor in their liquid texture mortal wound
> Receive, no more than can the fluid air:
> All heart they live, all head, all eye, all ear,
> All intellect, all sense."
>
> (P. L., VI., 344–51.)

The thing of primary importance to be noted in this is that no slur whatsoever is cast upon the senses; they are not regarded by the poet in the least as an element of disgrace to man or heavenly spirit, and we are assured that the angel in his finer organization is "all sense," just as fully as he is "all intellect." Puritan that he was, his penetrative insight and firm logical sense could not tolerate the idea of inherent degradation in a creature carefully and deliberately contrived by God in his infinite wisdom. The poet, although far from self-indulgent, was not in any sense an ascetic; mind and body being so closely wedded, he would permit to each all reasonable and legitimate gratification. In the Fifth Book of *Paradise Lost* Michael willingly accepts Adam's invitation to share their simple repast, and tells him that the spirits in Heaven also partake of food with satisfaction:

> So down they sat,
> And to their viands fell; nor seemingly
> The Angel, nor in mist—the common gloss
> Of theologians—but with keen dispatch
> Of real hunger.
>
> (P. L., V., 433–7.)

While enjoining the use and temperate enjoyment of all good things, the Angel enforces the lesson of temperance, and instructs Adam of the means by which man may come in peace to the end of his career:

> "If thou well observe
> The rule of *Not too much,* by temperance taught,
> * * * * *
> Till many years over thy head return.
> So may'st thou live, till, like ripe fruit, thou drop
> Into thy mother's lap, or be with ease
> Gathered, not harshly plucked, for death mature."
> (P. L., XI., 530–7.)

The earliest date that can be assigned to the sonnet under consideration is 1656; in November of that year he married the dearly loved Catherine Woodcock, so that it is fair to assume either that the sonnet was written previous to that date, or what is more likely still, after her death, at some time not later than 1660. As one reads it with this contingency in mind, it is easy to imagine a mood of composition not dissimilar to that which long before had found expression in *Il Penseroso:*

> Come, pensive nun, devout and pure,
> Sober, steadfast, and demure;
> * * * * *
> And join with thee calm Peace and Quiet,
> Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet.
> (Il Pen., 31–46.)

Milton's revelry would not drive away any of this train, not even "spare Fast"; he would welcome him too, so that he might be permitted—

"Oft with gods [to] diet,
And [hear] the Muses in a ring
Aye round about Jove's altar sing."
(Il Pen., 46–8.)

In a vein similar to that of the sonnet under consideration, and in one equally agreeable since it is found in a sonnet addressed by the blind scholar and poet to a youthful friend, is the first of the two to Cyriack Skinner, the grandson of Coke-on-Littleton. Milton's nephew informs us that more than any one else of the poet's intimates this youth frequented his house.*

Cyriack, whose grandsire on the royal bench
Of British Themis, with no mean applause,
Pronounced, and in his volumes taught, our laws,
Which others at their bar so often wrench,
To-day deep thoughts resolve with me to drench
In mirth that after no repenting draws;
Let Euclid rest, and Archimedes pause,
And what the Swede intends, and what the French.
To measure life learn thou betimes, and know
Toward solid good what leads the nearest way;
For other things mild Heaven a time ordains,
And disapproves that care, though wise in show,
That with superfluous burden loads the day,
And, when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.†

Cyriack Skinner, it is known, acted as Milton's amanuensis in 1656, and this sonnet was composed during the preceding year. He was an Anabaptist, the sect of Bun-

* "Above all Mr. Cyriack Skinner." Philips's *Life* of his uncle.
† In the fifth line the word "resolve" is in the imperative mood, "Do thou resolve with me to drench deep thoughts In mirth," etc. In the eighth line "intends" is the reading as found in the Cambridge manuscript. This was changed by Philips to "intend" in the edition of 1673; but it is to be

yan; the belief of those who composed this body being, as the name implies, that infant baptism alone was useless,—that it was necessary to baptize a person again after he had arrived at the age of moral responsibility, —to "rebaptize."*

In the essay by Dr. Williamson on the portraits of Milton, published at Cambridge at the time of the Milton Tercentenary, is included the reproduction of a picture by Pieter Van der Plas, now in the National Portrait Gallery, and "considered to represent John Milton." As accessory it has the pilgrim's staff and flask of gourd. It is probably a portrait of Bunyan, and the thing about it of especial interest is that it should look so much like the poet; the mouth, in particular, bearing far greater resemblance to that feature of Milton, as we see it in portraits of established authenticity, than the same feature in what is called the "Woodcock portrait" of the poet, included in this volume. It has been said,—"God may have fashioned the other features but man makes his own mouth." It is the Puritan temperament that both of the portraits reveal, and they reveal strong self-control. If these men were not of the ascetic type, at least there was not in the countenance of either of them the slightest stain of sensuality. The commanding delights of both were those of the spirit, and of the intelligence as ministering to the spirit; but at the same time a sound and

borne in mind that Milton did not himself revise the proofs. If the verb were to be in the plural, one would naturally expect the reading: "And what the Swedes intend."

* In the tract published by Milton the year before his death, *Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration, etc.*, he includes the Anabaptists among those to whom he would extend toleration. He would have leniency even for those who have misunderstood Scripture, if it so be that they have prayed in sincerity. The full phials of his wrath were reserved for Roman Catholics; toward them he was relentless.

healthy body accepted serenely and without perturbation its legitimate satisfactions.

That Skinner had now become Milton's intimate friend marks the poet's severance at this time both from the Presbyterians and the Independents. It was with Daniel Skinner, "merchant," the nephew of Cyriack Skinner, that the poet at a later date deposited the manuscript of the *Christian Doctrine,* destined to disappear and not to be published until a century and a half after his death.

Johnson's estimate of *Paradise Lost,* in spite of his antipathy to the Puritan, is generous and discriminating, but upon only two of the sonnets could he bring himself to bestow even mild approbation,—upon the one that we are considering, and the eighth, that written *When the Assault was Intended to the City.* "The sonnets deserve not any particular criticism," he tells us, "for of the best it can only be said that they are not bad; and perhaps only the eighth and the twenty-first are truly entitled to this slender commendation." The noblest one of all, composed in eulogy of the "slaughtered saints" among the Waldenses, was hateful to him as savouring of the Dissenters. It was hard for him to bestow praise unless it were wrung from him by lofty and sustained power in the work of one whom he elsewhere characterized in lordly Johnsonian formula as "an acrimonious and surly Republican."*

Landor's criticism of Milton is always illuminating, therefore it is of no slight interest to see what he has

* If one would see how far blind prejudice can sway a man from a sense of fairness, he has but to note that Johnson deliberately accuses Milton of having himself inserted into the *Eikon Basiliké* a certain prayer from Sidney's *Arcadia,* for the sake of afterwards accusing the King of plagiarism. Pattison's *Milton,* 103–4.

to say in regard to the sonnets: "But what noble ones are the eighth, the fifteenth, the sixteenth, the seventeenth, and above all the eighteenth. There is a mild and serious sublimity in the nineteenth.* In the twentieth there is the festivity of Horace, with a due observance of his precept, applicable metaphorically,

Simplici myrto nihil adlabores.

This is among the few English poems which are quite classical, according to our notions, as the Greeks and Romans have impressed them. It is pleasing to find Milton, in his later years, thus disposed to cheerfulness and conviviality. There are climates of the earth, it is said, in which a warm season intervenes between autumn and winter.† Such a season came to reanimate, not the earth itself, but what was highest upon it. A few of Milton's sonnets are extremely bad: the rest are excellent. Among all Shakespeare's, not a single one is very admirable, a few sink very low." ‡

The sonnets to Lawrence, to Lawes, and the first of those to Cyriack Skinner, were inspired by friendship, as were those *To a Virtuous Young Lady,* and that to the memory of Catherine Thomson, who had recently

* The eighth is the one addressed to the "Lady! that in the prime of earliest youth"; the fifteenth, *To the Lord General Fairfax;* the sixteenth, *To Cromwell;* the seventeenth, *To Sir Henry Vane;* "and above all" the eighteenth, *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont.* The nineteenth is *On his Blindness;* the twentieth, that *To Lawrence.*

† St. Martin's summer, our Indian summer.

‡ May one, at the same time, be a good critic of Milton and a very poor one of Shakespeare? In the words last quoted it was the period in which he lived that spoke through Landor's mouth. If our own time have no other trait of distinction, and if few are now moved by the grandeur of Milton's verse, yet has it been the peculiar good fortune of our age to attain to an intimate and sympathetic comprehension of great Shakespeare's mind. The Elizabethan age, with its love of adventure, and our own "Locomotive Age,"—going with intense rapidity we know not whither,—dissimilar as they are in most respects, at least have this in common.

died. Besides these, Milton paid the magnificent tribute of *Lycidas* to the memory of Edward King, whom he had known but slightly. We have also of a similar nature his tribute in Latin verse to his father, for whom he had the deepest affection, and—finest of all as an expression of devotion—the *Epitaphium Damonis,* to the memory of his cherished Diodati. This was Milton's last poem in Latin, and his best; we are fortunate in having a translation by one sensitive to the true significance of words whether in Latin or English,—the poet Cowper. Milton's friendship for Diodati was, as we have seen, the commanding passion of his early years. More than any one else did that youth share his confidence and aspirations. It was a love pure and noble and made sacred by death:

> My Damon lost;—he too was Tuscan born,
> Born in your Lucca, city of renown!
> And wit possessed, and genius and renown.
> * * * * *
> [Oh] who, when summer suns their summit reach,
> And Pan sleeps hidden by the sheltering beech,
> * * * * *
> Who then shall render me the pleasant vein
> Of Attic wit, thy jests, thy smiles again?

In more serious vein, he laments his own lot, robbed of his friend's affection and sympathy; words of pathetic import that might fittingly be inscribed above the grave of Catherine Woodcock:

> We scarce in thousands meet one kindred mind;
> And if the long-sought good at last we find,
> When least we fear it, Death our treasure steals,
> And gives our heart a wound that nothing heals.*

*Cowper's translation.

XX

BEFORE we consider Milton's last touching utterance in the sonnet form, it may be well to regard for a moment these poems as a whole, and see, if we may, what qualities they possess which warrant a careful study of them, although in a sense they be fragmentary and disconnected.

Milton's sonnets reflect the period of his career in which they were written; they give us an insight into many intimate details of his life, and are of enormous interest to his biographer when studied in connection with the poetry of his maturer years; they are the simple, forceful utterance of a great poet who has sacrificed his passion for Poetry to one stronger still, his consuming love of Liberty. The sonnets, in many ways, show the limitations of his life. They are not composed in an imaginative vein; while this man was endowed with a powerful organic imagination of the first order, capable of expressing itself in myriad and ever varying forms of beauty, the sonnets are of Doric severity and simplicity.

It is remarkable that the fault of ornateness, which this kind of verse had derived in a perfectly legitimate way from its Italian prototype, but which was not suited to the genius of our language, should have been corrected by the one English poet whose imaginative powers were the most stately and the most commanding of them all. Shakespeare and Spenser may well have surpassed him in variety of imaginative conception, of imaginative fancy, but few will question that in the ren-

dering of sublimity,—that which is "uplifted" above the imperfections of humanity,—his is the greater name.

In the limited field now under consideration, his was the credit of having penetrated to the life and intimate nature of the Sonnet, and of having recognized its exact scope and place in literature. For twenty years he chose no other form of expression in verse. It would not be surprising if poetical work whose merit so experienced a critic as Dr. Johnson was for the most part unable to detect, and which others since have thought of no great value, should fail to make an impression on cursory acquaintance; but when we have the testimony of Wordsworth, who calls them "soul-animating strains," it behooves one, if he may, to penetrate to the secret of their power. There is in the sonnets of Milton an exercise of art displayed which it took the kindred endowment of Wordsworth fully to perceive and appreciate: "My admiration of some of the Sonnets of Milton first tempted me to write in that form," he tells us.* "In the cottage, Town-end, Grasmere, one afternoon in 1801, my sister read to me the Sonnets of Milton. I had long been well acquainted with them, but I was particularly struck on that occasion with the dignified simplicity and majestic harmony that runs through most of them—in character so totally different from the Italian, and still more so from Shakespeare's fine sonnets. I took fire, if I may be allowed to say so, and produced three sonnets the same afternoon, the first I ever wrote, except an irregular one at school." †

The conditions under which were composed Words-

* *Advertisement* to the edition of the collected SONNETS, 1838.
† Note by Wordsworth to *Miscellaneous Sonnets,* Knight's Ed., VII., 154.

worth's sonnets and those of Milton were as different as possible; this series of verse by the bard of Windermere was the fruit of a poet's mind at leisure and carefully sheltered from distraction. The key to the working out and to the fertility of Wordsworth's genius may be found in one of his sonnets and in a letter, the two written more than a quarter of a century apart;—the letter long before success had crowned him, the sonnet after the vast bulk of the poetry on which his fame depends was composed:

Most sweet it is with unuplifted eyes
To pace the ground, if path there be or none,
While a fair region round the traveller lies
Which he forbears again to look upon;
Pleased rather with some soft ideal scene,
The work of Fancy, or some happy tone
Of meditation, slipping in between
The beauty coming and the beauty gone.
If Thought and Love desert us, from that day
Let us break off all commerce with the Muse:
With Thought and Love companions of our way,
Whate'er the senses take or may refuse,
The Mind's internal heaven shall shed her dews
Of inspiration in the humblest lay.*

Wordsworth had long meditated on the deepest issues of life, and had thrown his whole soul into what he had said. People naturally would not at first accept such doctrines, their interests being engrossed in the struggle for preferment, and in all sorts of trivial ambitions,—as he himself has confessed,—an admission perhaps all the easier in his case because it was largely the confession of other people's sins; he has assured us that—

* Composed in 1833.

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

"What have the things which I have written," he confides with touching frankness to Lady Beaumont, "to do (to say it all at once) with a life without love? In such a life there can be no thought; for we have no thought (save thoughts of pain), but as far as we have love and admiration." *

"And without love no happiness,"

said Milton.† Each had discovered what was the best worth while of all.

In love and thought Wordsworth's life was rounded; one was possible to him only as the other was abundantly lavished upon him, and those who are familiar with the circumstances of his career know that during the twenty years of his inspired poetic utterance he was surrounded with all the care which the affection of two remarkable women, his wife and his sister, both of them of the highest intelligence and sensibility, could suggest. Forced to live with rigid economy, yet with everything done for him that love could prompt, removed from the distractions of society and the world, nourishing in meditative calm and continence a life of sedate reflection, it is no wonder that his mind attained that healthfulness which is revealed in the splendid sanity of his verse, the joy and refreshment and health of which could make conquest even of the scientifically derived dissatisfaction and overwhelming sense of futility and dejection which beset John Stuart Mill at one time, as he tells us in his

* Letter to Lady Beaumont, 1807.
† P. L., VIII., 621.

Autobiography, and which perhaps much oftener prevails in the moods of less elaborately and mechanically sustained faculties.

Solitude and fostering care were absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of that which Wordsworth performed; on the contrary, Milton produced the work that we are considering amid the bustle and distractions of public affairs, and while occupied in fighting the disputatious battles of his party. Is it to be wondered at that such work partakes of limitations? Yet "Milton's [sonnets] stand supreme in stateliness, [as] Wordsworth's in depth and delicacy," says Francis Turner Palgrave; a judgment in which most critics will concur. What qualities unite in them to produce their stateliness?

The sonnets are not part of Milton's imaginative poetry, are not of the same order of poetry at all as *Lycidas, Il Penseroso,* and *Paradise Lost.* These would approach, or fulfil, the function of Poetry as Wordsworth has defined it, as being the end toward which he himself as a poet aspired: "To console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and to feel." * No one can question that he had strength of feeling, but a part of his equipment also was an intense desire to elevate the feelings and thoughts and ideals of mankind.

It is not for clairvoyant sight, a strength of vision penetrating to the inmost life of things, for which these sonnets are remarkable; nor does their value consist in profound thought,—they are not to be compared in this respect with those of Shakespeare, for his are packed

* Letter to Lady Beaumont.

full of meaning, a more recondite significance often underlying that which is first apparent. It is strength of feeling which the best of these sonnets reveal; therein lies their charm, and in the simplicity of the means by which the poet has produced in us the emotions which had possession of his own breast. In the sonnets we do not find the lyrical poet expressing himself; they are simple, almost staid, but they reveal the man.

In many moods that beset us, particularly in dejection or disappointment, Wordsworth may recall one to a feeling of "Joy in widest commonalty spread" as hardly any other poet can. The "still, sad music of humanity" was an undertone that not even poetic ecstasy, or mood of most remote abstraction, could ever forget. Milton's function is not that; *Paradise Lost,* or the *Regained,* or the *Agonistes,* or the ode *On the Nativity,* or the *Avenge, O Lord,* should be read at the height of one's faculties; in one's strength must their strength be proved.

XXI

THE stateliness of Milton's thought is blended with a noble tenderness in the last of the sonnets, the one in memory of his dearly belovéd wife, who was but lately dead. We know from his nephew's narrative that he was at work now upon *Paradise Lost;* living an intense, inner, ideal existence, in the presence of archangels and of seraphim, surrounded by the realities and splendours of Heaven, or walking in Paradise with our first parents, feeling with them, as none ever felt more vividly, the favour of God and the majesty of innocence, —man's happiest life, "simplicity and spotless innocence":

> "Mine eyes he closed, but open left the cell
> Of fancy, my internal sight."
>
> (P. L., VIII., 460–1.)

To this "internal sight" his wife appeared in vision:

> Methought I saw my late espoused saint
> Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave.

Her face he had never seen, and even here that satisfaction was denied him,—she came—

> Vested all in white, pure as her mind.
> Her face was veiled; yet to my fancied sight
> Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
> So clear as in no face with more delight.
> But, oh! as to embrace me she inclined,
> I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

These verses, composed in his hour of loss and of helplessness by this man of diametrically opposed endowment,—one that possessed at the same time sensibility and gigantic strength, to each swaying breath of passion as sensitive as gossamer yet like the tornado in force,—are most touching; they contain the very soul of pathos. Nothing could be more free from any fault of elaboration than the simple words which compose this little masterpiece; their power lies in the fact that they come straight from the heart of a good and strongly affectionate man. As one reads them his sympathy goes out to the poet in his distress, and if he might he would gladly bear a portion of his burden of sorrow.

The last verse is the lamentation of the blind, from the cheerful ways of men cut off. Long afterwards, in *Paradise Lost,* there occurs an echo of this sonnet in the

passage where Adam describes the vision in which was revealed to him the creation of Eve:

> "She disappeared, and left me dark; I waked
> To find her, or for ever to deplore
> Her loss, and other pleasures all abjure."
> (P. L., VIII., 478–80.)

The names of Milton and Dante will always be associated together as of those who have the most vividly portrayed the scenes of the other world; these two men of very different endowment had this also in common,—their devotion to the memory of a good woman. Dante had his Beatrice, and his love for her glorifies and transforms his grave and often saturnine temper;—in like manner, though of a very different nature, Milton had Catherine Woodcock, whom he tenderly loved. The year of their married life made Paradise a reality to him,—no dream,—

> But such a sacred and home-felt delight,
> Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
> (Comus, 262–3.)

as made existence together, even in blindness, a reflection of Heaven. Her memory was an unfailing fount of joy and inspiration when later he came to depict the newly-created Eve, of whom he assures us—

> "Grace was in all her steps, Heaven in her eye,
> In every gesture dignity and love."
> (P. L., VIII., 488–9.)

The poet's laudation of his heroine is not alone of physical perfection, and we feel that he had her in mind whose memory he so dearly cherished,—

"When I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in herself complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best."
(P. L., VIII., 546–50.)

"Neither her outside formed so fair,
* * * * *
So much delights me as those graceful acts,
Those thousand decencies, that daily flow
From all her words and actions, mixed with love
And sweet compliance, which declare unfeigned
Union of mind, or in us both one soul;
Harmony to behold in wedded pair
More grateful than harmonious sound to the ear."
(P. L., VIII., 596–606.)

These two were in perfect accord; Milton in his *Tetrachordon* reminds the reader that never again could there be such perfect alliance between man and woman as that which existed between Adam and Eve, since she was literally a part of his being,—soul of his inmost soul, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone. Though under irresistible and cruel temptation they sinned, yet was their error mutual and their reconciliation complete.

Milton's marriage with Catherine Woodcock had given him a standard of serene union between man and woman, the perfect harmony being realized between the senses and the spirit, the two factors of man's existence which he believed in life and death were one and inseparable. Having himself been through the awful ordeal of an unfortunate and uncongenial marriage, when he came to be united with this woman of his heart every fibre of his being sang aloud for joy, and the mighty

forces of his nature swung into their appointed orbit in rhythm like that of the celestial spheres. One is reminded of the saying of another great poet: "On the day of my marriage the peace of God settled upon my spirit."

No longer were angry arguments on divorce, or on the assorted miseries of a literary censorship, or on the organization of Presbyterian ministers (a quarrelsome committee-of-the-whole considering the question of individual salvation), or on the nightmare of the King's execution,—which by the irony of fate it fell to this poet to justify and applaud, and which, although he would not have admitted it, outraged his reverence for order and decency;—no longer were these things to torment him and to wring from his distress titanic pamphlets, full of bitterness and invective, and of ineffectual lashings of energy, like those of Gulliver tied with threads and shot at with needles.

This whole middle period is illuminative by reason of that which it did not contain. It furnished opportunity for the exercise and development of tremendous force, but he knew as well as any one in the world that he was struggling against nature: "having the use but of my left hand," he tells us. When the balm of a happy marriage fell upon his soul all of his restless energies subsided into quiet calm; turmoil and distress were succeeded by peace; remotely then he saw the glories of Paradise; if he perceived them afar, yet was his vision clear. In his mind, thus freed from its hovering clouds of unrest and anxiety, there began to rise the outlines of that sublime structure of which he was soon to be the architect. That the death of his second wife was a pro-

found grief we have every reason to believe; the marriage thus ending had brought to him sorrow, yet, as well, had it brought back the tenderness of youth,—and the creative energy of youth.*

Of his third marriage it is not so easy to speak. The male principle was strong in this man; it was commensurate with his intellectual energy and with his endowment as a poet. Lesser men, sitting in sedate judgment long after his death, may not be able to comprehend, but they must accept the facts as they find them. His marriage to Elizabeth Minshull satisfied this craving of his nature, and left him free to express his genius in serenity of spirit. It is easy to characterize the union as not being in the highest sense a "marriage of true minds," but we are confronted by the results. This woman gave to him affection, and he gave to us *Paradise Lost;* it seems very simple. Aubrey has recorded that he was "of a very cheerful humour. Seldom took any physique, only sometimes he took manna.† He was very healthy, and free from all diseases, only toward his later end he was visited by the goute, spring and fall. He would be chearfull even in his goute-fitts,—and sing." Could one wish more convincing proof of his wife's care and of his own contentment?

Many appreciative criticisms have been written on the dignity and the pathos of this last sonnet. The quality of sublimity perhaps more fully than anything else is the peculiar trait which marks the poetry of Milton as

* By a strange fatality both his first wife and his second wife died in childbirth. Catherine Woodcock's little daughter survived her but a few months.

† There was not lacking an element of fitness in the circumstance that he whose "tongue dropt manna" should himself find comfort in one of the gentlest of drugs, honoured by that name.

compared with that of other men,—that and its note of high distinction. There was in him entire sincerity, consistent and unfailing, and enthusiasm so convincing that we stand in the presence of that which he portrays.*

Even in the brief compass of a sonnet this sublime quality may be recognized, like the murmuring of the ocean in the shell which is cast upon its shore,—and when the mighty reverberations of the *Avenge, O Lord* resound in our ears, we stand in awe, catching a glimpse of the infinite, and listening for a brief moment to the powerful organ tones of that little masterpiece. In like manner, when we read this last sonnet to the memory of his wife, having in mind the sort of man that Milton was, so far as we are able to comprehend the vastness of his endowment, his greatness of character, the volume and impetuous force of his intellectual equipment, his almost unrivalled poetic gift, the passion for moral perfection which controlled him, and his consuming zeal for liberty,—when we reflect upon all these things, we are profoundly moved by the pathos of the sonnet; and if our blood be not stirred by awe as in that on the massacre of the Waldenses, we are moved by deep compassion,—by "pity and ruth,"—in beholding his reverence for a good woman who in a life of stern devotion to

* Jowett, in discussing the genius of Plato, has an admirable word of comment upon the quality of sublimity in the poems of Milton: "Both authors [Plato and Milton] attain, perhaps more frequently than almost any others, that highest species of sublimity,—the *morally* sublime; arresting and transfixing the soul by the naked majesty of lofty sentiments and purely spiritual abstractions, and readily dispensing with material and palpable images. It is in such lines as those in which Milton speaks of 'thoughts that wander through eternity', or of 'the mind [as] its own place,' which 'Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven,' that his muse soars to the highest pitch, and in which he truly '[unspheres] the spirit of Plato.'" Benjamin Jowett, *The Genius of Plato, Edinburgh Review,* LXXXVII., 335, foot-note. See P. L., I., 254–5, II., 148; Il Pen., 88–9. I have taken the liberty of correcting the quotations.

noble causes, in his blindness and in his grief, had for a time all too brief been his solace and joy and admiration:

> Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
> So clear as in no face with more delight.

One may be sure that his capacity for experiencing both pleasure and pain was commensurate with his sensibility and with his strength. In this sonnet he has admitted us very intimately to share both his sorrow and his resignation. The unaffected dignity of the lines which form the ending of his utterance of this period, may be compared with the directness and simplicity which characterize the ending of *Paradise Lost,* of the *Regained,* and of the *Agonistes.* In the first of these poems Michael was sent to lead from Paradise "our primitive great Sire," and by his side Eve, repentant and in tears,—

> They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
> Through Eden took their solitary way.
>
> (P. L., XII., 648–9.)

In *Paradise Regained,* after the angelic escort had borne Christ in safety from the topmost pinnacle of the temple, and had ministered to his refreshment with celestial food,—

> He, unobserved,
> Home to his mother's house private returned.
>
> (P. R., IV., 638–9.)

And in the *Agonistes,* the closing verses form a supremely fitting ending for his last expression in verse,—

> His servants He, * * *
> With peace and consolation hath dismissed,
> And calm of mind, all passion spent.
>
> (S. A., 1755–8.)

In like manner the *Sonnets,* which for twenty years are the brief record of Milton's poetic life, have their impressive close. The realities of worldly happiness for him were at an end. Monarchy restored; puritanism defeated; himself wandering in the dark mazes of blindness; his wife, who had brought him consolation and joy, dead; well might he say—

> Though fallen on evil days,
> On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues;
> In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,
> And solitude;
>
> (P. L., VII., 25–28.)

or confess, as he does in his final lament of all—

> "Nor am I in the list of them that hope;
> Hopeless are all my evils; all remediless.
> This one prayer yet remains: * *
> * * * speedy death,
> The close of all my miseries and the balm."
>
> (S. A., 647–51.)

The life in vision, alone now was a reality. To him, made fit by suffering, by unfailing courage, and by the grace of God, was granted to see the glories of Heaven, and to taste of its beatitudes. In a dream the compassionate tenderness of God had vouchsafed for a moment again the presence of his wife, but we hear his moan of resignation,—

> I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

MILTON'S CONFESSION OF FAITH

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I

A PASSION for liberty and for moral perfection, perhaps more than any other traits that could be named, were the leading motives of Milton's life. He was constantly brooding over subjects of an ethical nature. In a Latin epistle in verse addressed to his beloved Diodati, when he was a youth at Cambridge, there is a passage which clearly strikes this note, a note ever recurring, ever triumphant, in the harmony and "perfect diapason" of his life. "As to other points," he writes, "which God may have determined for me, I know not; but this I know, that if he ever instilled an intense love of moral beauty into the breast of any man, he has instilled it into mine."

Before his Italian journey, in 1638, Milton had cast in his lot with the Puritans, and on his way back from Venice he visited, as a mark of reverence, the home of the reformed faith at Geneva. He was still a member of the Established Church, but of the Puritan and Calvinistic party, as contrasted with that of the Arminians, under the leadership of Archbishop Laud. Two years after his return he had become affiliated with the Pres-

byterians; his purpose being to reform the Church by the abolition of the bishops, and by introducing the form of government which prevailed in the Scottish Church. Before 1649 he had become an Independent; each congregation he would have autonomous, free from the dictation of any synod whatever.

In the year 1643 had occurred a tragic circumstance in his life,—his rash marriage, following a courtship all too brief, the failure of the newly married pair to achieve happiness, and the return of the bride, after a few weeks of discontent, to her parents' home. Milton felt the blow in proportion to his capacity for pleasure and for pain, and in the ferment of disappointment, with the energy of a Titan fully aroused,—in the fervour of his distress —struck off at white heat his tractates on divorce. These pamphlets were more advanced in tone than his fellow-churchman could at once be reconciled to accept. They were the cry of an honourable man, wounded almost unto death. After their publication his relations with the Presbyterians became somewhat strained. He was made the subject of adverse criticism and did not hesitate to retaliate in kind. The result was that, following this episode, and also by reason of the evolution of his belief, he became estranged from all religious organizations, and year by year cared less for creeds of any sort. In the end he attained to a simplicity and sincerity of faith, so far as essentials were concerned, almost identical with that of George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends. It is altogether probable that he would have rejected the formalism of the Quakers, and his own scheme of toleration, as set forth in the *Christian Doctrine,* did not include that sect.

Fox was nearly sixteen years younger than Milton. In many respects they were most unlike: one of them a student, saturated with the learning and with the literature of the ancient world, and sensitively responding to the inspiration of the Renaissance with its passionate love of beauty; the other with but slight learning of the schools, and, as compared with Milton, so far as scholastic equipment is concerned, a pigmy in the presence of a giant,—yet in spiritual matters were they equals and standing upon the same lofty plane.

Before examining those passages in Milton's poetry which set forth his creed, let us briefly consider Fox's belief, his aspirations, and attitude of mind. As in Milton's case, it had been the intention of his parents that he should enter the Church of England. He tells us of no objection on his own part, "but others persuaded to the contrary," therefore he was apprenticed to a shoemaker who owned sheep and dealt in wool. Here he won a reputation for veracity, and meditated on the hollow structure of society.

Fox's belief, in striking contrast with that of Calvin, is based upon his confidence in the perfectibility of human nature; he felt that every man should set before himself an ideal standard and that he should conform to this, so far as he could, and that he should willingly accept no compromise. Without ceasing, he lauded man's greatest worldly achievement, as he conceived it to be,—

> His happiest life,
> Simplicity and spotless innocence!
> (P. L., IV., 317–18.)

Goodness and wisdom with him were synonymous; he would have accepted without demur the word of the

Archangel in *Paradise Lost,* where almost in a parenthesis, as it were, he enunciates the whole foundation of a creed, in referring to

> "Virtue which is reason."
> (P. L., XII., 98.)*

He preached early and late that God is light, a light which shines into every man's heart who will open it to this source of delight. The inward assurance of grace came as a blessed refreshment after the hateful blight of foreordained sin and its fatal train of consequences, as accepted by the followers of Calvin. Although Quakerism was soon to enter a period of stagnation and to become dull enough, Fox brought to the serious-minded of his generation a message of peace and content. The sunlight of grace flooded their hearts with joy.

Fox believed that there had come to him a direct word from God. The "inner light" was such a revelation to his own spirit, and acting in conformity with that, he shaped each minute circumstance of his career. Christ was recognized as the continuous divine principle in every man, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever." As soon as any person accepted that guidance he was at one with God; the awakening was when man realized this possibility of contact with God. Some of the specific messages which Fox received appear to us now to have an exaggerated importance attached to them, but the principle at the bottom of all is the belief that man partakes of the illuminating spirit, and may

* Conversely to this, sin is un-reason. If one be the sign of health, the other may be regarded as a symptom of moral disease, and I think that both Milton and Fox would so have regarded it.

himself attain to a nature of perfection, to freedom from anxiety, and to peace.

The Friends took pains to make clear that they were not a sect; they were a society,—the Society of Friends,—surely a most fortunate designation. "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly." There was a sort of freemasonry and sodality among them that held them together. They were bound into a close fraternity by many ties,—ties of sympathy in the life of the spirit, of devotion to their leader, of suffering together beneath unjust persecution. When this persecution was withdrawn, and their leader had departed, an era of stagnation followed that of growth and enthusiasm.

The first name for themselves adopted by the Friends was "Children of Light"; there was but one church, composed of those who obeyed that guidance. A trait of mysticism prevented them, as a rule, from indulging in too bald and explicit definitions. We shall see that the blind Milton shared this reverence for light appealing both to the outward and to the inward eye.

One element of Fox's equipment was his complete familiarity with the Bible; this he knew almost by heart, so that it was a saying: "Though the Bible were lost, it might be found in the mouth of George Fox." Milton also knew his Bible from beginning to end, and his powerful brain grasped the significance of scattered passages in their most complex and diversified significance; only so could a blind man have arrayed the innumerable texts of the *Christian Doctrine*.

Fox believed that God did not dwell in temples made with hands, and that no particular sacredness attached to any building, or church, or cathedral. All religious

ceremonies were hateful to him; he bore testimony against the payment of tithes; protested against a priesthood, and the paying of any person who rendered religious service. The clergy at that time were corrupt, and a favourite phrase of his was that "priests" were "hollow casks." The Bible, he believed, was the expression of the Spirit of God in the men who wrote its pages, and he believed that that same Spirit was in every man who directly received its message; God dwelt in his soul.

The whole religious belief of Fox is founded on the principle of the innate spirituality of man. God is within him; God is within each of his fellows who will receive the light of grace within the heart. Hence every man must be treated with reverence and with equal deference, peasant as well as king, since there is in him a spark of the divine nature. Conforming to this, he refused to doff his hat in the presence of sovereign, or judge, or military officer, or to compliment him by the use of the plural pronoun. That the democratic principle has since been carried to an extreme and absurd length, doubtless many at this day feel assured. In Fox's time the reform in this direction was a much needed one, and the craving for individual dignity also appealed strongly to Milton, who, if he did not to the same extent partake of Fox's proclivities in the direction of democracy, yet shared his passion for liberty, for personal freedom, and for wise governance.

Fox and his followers refused to take all oaths, maintaining that a man's word should be true, and as solemn and binding as if he summoned God to witness its veracity. This attitude of the Friends caused endless persecution, which only tended to make more firm their

belief in the worth and dignity of simple asseveration. In order to cause them annoyance they were subjected to the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, which they declined from motives of conscience, and for which refusal they were as regularly thrown into prison.

Oxford and Cambridge could not make ministers,—this, Fox declared, came to him as a revelation. He felt that something more than human learning was necessary to make a man fit to serve the spiritual wants of his brother. As a corollary to this he believed that the ministry was open to all; a man's conviction that he had God in his heart constituted him a minister. The "sense of the meeting" acted as the safeguard to this privilege. If it were human conceit and not divine guidance that prompted utterance at their gatherings, the individual was gently but firmly reminded that he was mistaken in his mission. When love and Christian charity regulated this supervision, the principle of free speech worked to the happiness of all far more than the casual spectator might have deemed possible. The technical phraseology applying to this situation was that the individual felt "a call" to speak. Whether it were a true call, it remained for him to demonstrate. He might not speak "until the Spirit moved him," hence the periods of silent worship, moments of solemn anticipation until an angel should trouble the waters. Milton also believed that every member of a church should be authorized to speak "according to his gifts," "these gifts constituting his mission."*

Account must be taken of the apostolic character of Fox, of his intense fervour, of his glowing passion and

* William Ellery Channing, *Milton, Essays,* 60.

enthusiasm; there was a courageous fidelity in his temperament. He had religious insight, and he gave his entire life to bring to others that which had its residence in his own heart. The sincerity of the man was so complete, and his love for his fellow-man so genuine, that in true humility of spirit he could offer from this abundance of inward grace. His married life was happy, yet he spent the greater part of the time, after his union with Margaret Fell, separated from his "dear heart," as he fondly addresses her in his letters, travelling far and near on innumerable journeys.

The meeting-houses of the Society were bare of all adornment; within their walls there was nothing to interest the eye or to distract the mind. In the fervour of his soul, and in a sort of dry literalness of mind toward things unrelated to the spiritual life, Fox disregarded all that appealed to a sense of worldly beauty,—in this how different from Milton, a poet sensitive to every trait of perfection, equally responding to ideal excellence of character in men and women, and sensitive as well to every outward manifestation of beauty, to the delight of the eye, if not to the lust of the flesh.

To those who have made it a reproach to Fox that he was not a product of the universities, and versed in human wisdom, may be quoted the words of the Archangel to Adam during their conference in the happy garden. The latter, after a pæan of rejoicing for God's mercies, says,—

"Henceforth I learn * * *
* * that suffering for truth's sake
Is fortitude to highest victory." *
* * * * *
To whom thus also the Angel last replied:

"This having learned, thou hast attained the sum
Of wisdom; hope no higher, though all the stars
Thou knew'st by name, and all the ethereal powers,
All secrets of the deep, all Nature's works,
Or works of God in Heaven, air, Earth, or sea,
And all the riches of this world enjoy'dst,
And all the rule, one empire. Only add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable; add faith;
Add virtue, patience, temperance; add love,
By name to come called charity, the soul
Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loth
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A Paradise within thee, happier far."

(P. L., XII., 561–87.)

II

In many of the problems of society and life, Milton expressly disagreed with Fox; he believed in the permissibility of oaths, in the necessity, upon occasion, of war, and in the Hebraic subjection of women,—but when it came to the supreme authority of the Inner Light they were quite in accord. Both were the product of an identical age, and both sensitively responded to the spirit of the time. What happened was that the two men, with natures perfectly honest, sincere, and courageous, in a period of spiritual unrest and transformation, had arrived by different paths at the same attitude of mind. The lofty spirituality of Milton's friend Ellwood was exactly what he himself had realized in his own life for many years:

Other rites
Observing none but adoration pure,
Which God likes best.

(P. L., IV., 736–8.)

Even Dr. Johnson, while intensely disapproving of Milton's politics, only in part recognizing his genius, and even to some extent unmindful of his art,—by every lifelong prejudice of a Tory and devout churchman led to hate the attitude of mind of a republican and "regicide," of one who was a fearless contemner of rites and ceremonies,—even he is forced to do him this justice, admitting that "his studies and meditations were an habitual prayer." Milton had this in common with Fox, —the firm belief that the true end of all learning was "to repair the ruin of our first parents by regaining to know God aright";* that is the sum and substance of Fox's teaching. The dream of both was of—

> "New Heavens, new Earth, ages of endless date,
> Founded in righteousness and peace and love,
> To bring forth fruits, joy and eternal bliss."
> (P. L., XII., 549–51.)

Milton—had he known the man—would never have approved of Coleridge's dictum in regard to Fox, which by many has been accepted as final, that he was an "uneducated man of genius," for he himself had so clear an insight into spirituality of temperament that he would have been willing to admit Fox's qualifications as something apart from and above any considerations of intellectual endowment alone. What William Penn—himself a man of gentle birth and a courtier—said of Fox may be quoted as of wider significance. He was, said Penn, "civil beyond all forms of breeding in his behaviour." There was an innate refinement in the man, with which his simple manners and undecorated

* Letter to Samuel Hartlib.

veracity were not inconsistent. His civility was but the "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." What Milton has recorded in the Ninth Sonnet, the one beginning—

> Lady, that in the prime of earliest youth,

with slight change might have been addressed to Fox:

> Thy care is fixed, and zealously attends
> To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,
> And hope that reaps not shame. Therefore be sure
> Thou, when the Bridegroom with his feastful friends
> Passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night,
> Hast gained thy entrance, [Servant] wise and pure.
>
> (Sonnet IX.)

The Archangel's admonition he could accept without question or qualification:

> "Be lowly wise,
> Think only what concerns thee and thy being."
>
> (P. L., VIII., 173–4.)

Adam's reply to this gives the exact attitude of mind of the Children of Truth:

> "To know
> That which before us lies in daily life,
> Is the prime wisdom."
>
> (P. L., VIII., 192–4.)

Milton has expressed very clearly his estimate of human learning as contrasted with the deeper understanding; the words are spoken by Christ to Satan, who has tempted him to achieve fame by wisdom,—

> "However, many books,
> Wise men have said, are wearisome; who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not

A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
(And what he brings what needs he elsewhere seek?)
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself,
Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys
And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge,
As children gathering pebbles on the shore."

(P. R., IV., 321–30.)

In an earlier book Milton more fully expounds the same philosophy:

"But, if there be in glory aught of good,
It may by means far different be attained,
Without ambition, war, or violence—
By deeds of peace, by wisdom eminent,
By patience, temperance."

(P. R., III., 88–92.)

The entire poem of *Paradise Regained* is the story of one whose

Weakness [did] o'ercome Satanic strength.

(P. R., I., 161.)

This theme has been worked out by Milton more than once. In the Third Book of *Paradise Lost,* in the famous argument between the Almighty and the Son, wherein the whole scheme of Justice and Mercy is set forth, the former is made to say,—

"O thou, in Heaven and Earth the only peace
Found out for mankind under wrath, * *
Because thou hast, though throned in highest bliss
Equal to God, and equally enjoying
God-like fruition, quitted all to save
A world from utter loss, and hast been found
By merit more than birthright Son of God—
Found worthiest to be so by being good,

Far more than great or high; because in thee
Love hath abounded more than glory abounds;
Therefore thy humiliation shall exalt
With thee thy manhood also to this throne:
Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt reign
Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man,
Anointed universal King."

(P. L., III., 274–317.)

No more noble essay upon Milton was ever written than that which Emerson, at the midway of his career, contributed to the *North American Review.* The sustained and lofty spirit in which this is conceived reveals a mind of equal purity and of equal reverence for the spiritual life. Emerson, with an insight such as might naturally be expected in him, has emphasized what Milton stands for in the world of character, and has estimated aright exactly those traits which the name of Fox represents to those who are familiar with his career. "Few men," says Emerson, "could be cited who have so well understood [as Milton] what is peculiar in the Christian ethics, and the precise aid it has brought to men, in being an emphatic affirmation of the omnipotence of spiritual laws, * * * laying its chief stress on humility. * * * The fact that true greatness is a perfect humility [is a revelation] of Christianity which Milton well understood."

It may seem strange to associate the quality of humility with the name of Milton, since in matters of the understanding he had a perfectly just estimate of the amplitude of his own powers, and in the world of intelligence was so far removed from meekness that he cannot always escape the charge of intellectual arrogance. In his polemics he was intolerant and unyielding, but in

the world of spirit, how different! Here he felt himself to be as a little child, willing to accept meekly the admonition from on high that—

> "To obey is best;
> * * by things deemed weak,
> Subverting worldly-strong, and worldly-wise
> By simply meek; that suffering for Truth's sake
> Is fortitude to highest victory."
> (P. L., XII., 561–70.)

This was not merely recorded in dramatic fitness to the situation, but was as well the poet's personal and inmost conviction. Christian meekness was a part of his equipment, of his strength. "Christian meekness" and "intellectual arrogance" seem strange traits of the same mind; yet that mind, with all its vast range of scholarship, and sweep of imaginative vision, and capacity of sublime creation, was simple and uninvolved in comparison with that of Shakespeare, of whose genius complexity and evasive subtlety are the things that perhaps stand out in strongest relief when contrasted with that of Milton:

> Others abide our question. Thou art free.

The characteristic of one mind was that of simple grandeur; of the other, of complicated fullness. The dramatist took equal delight in portraying the king, the soldier, the philosopher, the maiden in sweetest mood of serious adolescence, and the buffoon. With the actor's versatility, the myriad facets of his mind reflect all the aspects of human character; his own he conceals. What he gives us is not, as in Milton, the conviction of matured and unyielding character, but the infinite play and interweaving

of human emotions, as hard to seize as the play of sunlight on the shifting ripples of a stream. All may behold it,—who except him can convey an image of that which is presented to the eye? One of these two men was the conscience of Puritan England, the other not a conscience but a sensitive, sane and powerful brain reflecting human nature in its most elusive phases. Our obligation to each is greater than we can conceive. Each introduces us to a world separate and commanding. It is probable that Milton sometimes read the plays of Shakespeare with impatience,—we almost have his word for this,—so commanding was his reverence for the classical drama; and it is equally probable that Shakespeare, in spite of all of Milton's puritanical limitations, would have read *Paradise Lost* with delight, so much greater an endowment of catholicity was his.

In the *Treatise on Christian Doctrine* Milton has clearly stated his belief; he says: "Under the Gospel we possess, as it were, a twofold Scripture: one external, which is the written word, and the other internal, which is the Holy Spirit, written in the heart of believers, according to the promise of God, and with the intent that it should by no means be neglected. * * * That which is internal * * * is far superior to all, namely the Spirit itself. * * * The external Scripture has been liable to frequent corruption. * * * But the Spirit which leads to truth cannot be corrupted, neither is it easy to deceive a man who is really spiritual."* This statement, said William Ellery Channing, "is genuine Quakerism." †

In further elaboration of this theme, Milton continues:

* *The Christian Doctrine*, XXX. † *Works of Channing*, I., 57.

"It is difficult to conjecture the purpose of Providence in committing the writings of the New Testament to such uncertain and variable guardianship [as the written record] unless it were to teach us by this very circumstance that the Spirit which is given to us is a more certain guide than Scripture, whom therefore it is our duty to follow." The comment upon this passage by Bishop Sumner,—a representative of that very church whose faults it had been Milton's appointed lot to castigate,—who by the whirligig of time was destined to make the translation of this treatise from the original Latin, is significant: "It is singular that Milton should have fallen into this error, which is that of the Quakers."

Only by the attainment of spiritual insight might one penetrate to the real significance of the Word of God; by diligence, by prayer, by perfect sincerity, man may attain to an understanding of—

> "The truth,
> * * * * *
> Left only in those written records pure,
> Though not but by the Spirit understood."
> (P. L., XII., 511–14.)

This is the assurance given by the Archangel to Adam, in that revelation upon the mount which God vouchsafed to man before his expulsion from the Garden of Innocence. Elsewhere he gives expression to a somewhat fuller elaboration of the same idea, expounding God's providence:

> "God hath now sent his living Oracle
> Into the world to teach his final will,
> And sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell

> In pious hearts, an inward oracle
> To all truth requisite for men to know":
> (P. R., I., 460–4.)

a precise statement of the doctrine of the inner light which was the very foundation of the teaching of Fox. This inward spirituality of Quakerism Milton constantly reflects, as where, in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,* he says, "For truth is as impossible to be soiled by any outward touch as the sunbeam." (III., 173.) In the *Agonistes* the Chorus voices the same sentiment:

> "Where the heart joins not, outward acts defile not."
> (S. A., 1368.)

In *Paradise Regained,* when Satan urges Christ to accomplish the conquest of David's throne by the aid of the power of Rome, promised to him by the tempter, Christ spurns such domination, and, picturing the luxury and degradation of the Romans, asks—

> "What wise and valiant man would seek to free
> These, thus degenerate, by themselves enslaved,
> Or could of inward slaves make outward free?"
> (P. R., IV., 143–5.)

Consistent with this is Milton's belief that "man is his own dungeon," and his reiterated praise of the "inner liberty," or his indignant rebuke of those—

> That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
> And still revolt when Truth would set them free.
> License they mean when they cry Liberty;
> For who loves that must first be wise and good.
> (Sonnet XII., 9–12.)

Could there be an exposition of man's accountability to himself of more esoteric nature,—to the godlike in

himself, to conscience and to the inner light,—than the judgment pronounced upon Satan returning to Pandemonium after he has accomplished his evil design against man! Confident of the applause of the hosts of Hell, he awaits their commendation, when, instead of that, horror seizes upon him and he falls prone in the dust, a grovelling serpent,—

> Punished in the shape he sinned,
> According to his doom;
>
> (P. L., X., 516–17.)

and his following, angels of the celestial host, are promptly compelled to share the same fate,—

> Like in punishment,
> As in their crime.
>
> (P. L., X., 544–5.)

The idealism of the poet's youth is marked in the rebuke of the lady in *Comus* to the tempting spirit,—

> "And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know
> More happiness than this thy present lot."
>
> (Comus, 788–9.)

Our age finds it difficult to appreciate the elevation of mind from which such sentiments sprang exuberantly and without the slightest taint of affectation. "The sincere alone can recognize sincerity," saith Carlyle.*

III

Early in his career Milton lost all sympathy with the priesthood of the Established Church. When, in 1646, he wrote the sonnet *On the New Forcers of Conscience*

* *Heroes and Hero Worship*, 199.

under the Long Parliament, he put himself unequivocally on record. It is composed in a contemptuous and ironical vein, which with Milton in his wrath is about as conciliatory and soothing as sulphuric acid applied to the external cuticle of the human frame:

> Because you have thrown off your Prelate Lord,
> And with stiff vows renounced his Liturgy,
> To seize the widowed whore Plurality
> From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorred, etc.

Then, after the regulation fourteen lines of the sonnet have been exhausted and he has still somewhat left unexpressed, he adopts the form known in Italy as the *sonetto codato,* or tailed sonnet, here a veritable scorpion's tail with a vigourous sting in the end of it:

> But we do hope to find out all your tricks,
> Your plots and packing, worse than those of Trent,
> That so the Parliament
> May with their wholesome and preventive shears
> Clip your phylacteries, though baulk your ears,
> And succour our just fears,
> When they shall read this clearly in your charge:
> New *Presbyter* is but old *Priest* writ large.

That was a vigourous thrust of a sting, well driven home and slightly agitated afterwards so as to get complete and satisfactory results.

From the year 1654, Milton was an out-and-out Oliverian, and had severed all church connections, although theoretically sharing the hopes of the Independents. The salvation of his literary career and that which kept him from intemperate extremes was his passionate devotion to religious liberty, an aspiration which in the

fullest degree he shared with Fox. No one in England cherished this more cordially than did these two men. Milton also participated in Fox's loathing for the payment by the State of those who participated in religious services,—or, as Fox would have called them, the members of "a hireling ministry." As early as 1637, in that impassioned passage of *Lycidas,* Milton had made his protest against this abuse, in verses of no uncertain sound:

> "How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
> Enow of such as, for their bellies' sake,
> Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!
> Of other care they little reckoning make
> Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,
> And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
> * * * * *
> But that two-handed engine at the door
> Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."
>
> (Lycidas, 113–31.)

In the sonnet *To the Lord General Cromwell,* 1652, "On the Proposals of Certain Ministers for Propagation of the Gospel," the same feeling of indignation bursts forth:

> Peace hath her victories
> No less renowned than War: new foes arise,
> Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.
> Help us to save free conscience from the paw
> Of hireling wolves, whose Gospel is their maw.

In 1659, he wrote a pamphlet on this subject, entitled: *Considerations touching Means to remove Hirelings out of the Church.*

In all this agitation Milton was a pure idealist, just as much so as Fox. Religion, he believed, is the relation of

man to God; no intermediary may accept pay; worship is a state of spiritual contact between the divine within us and the divine above; and Milton believed, just as Fox did, that only a brother is fitted to perform this service for a brother. He who receives pay therefor has incapacitated himself to render efficient aid in a relation so intimate and so sincere. Cromwell was not of the same mind, however, and saw good and sufficient reasons for maintaining a state church.*

That no especial sanctity adheres to fane or shrine, to church or cathedral, Milton felt as completely as did Fox. The heart of man is the worshipping-place of God. The sanctity of the shrine is derived from the presence of the divine principle within the heart. When from the promontory, the lofty hill,—"of Paradise the highest,"—the panorama of the flood is presented and the destruction of mankind portrayed, Michael enlightens Adam as to the significance of that which he beholds, and incidentally gives us Milton's opinion as to the importance of man's consecration of the temple of God:

> "God attributes to place
> No sanctity, if none be thither brought
> By men who there frequent or therein dwell."
> (P. L., XI., 836–38.)

If there be a note of pantheism in the belief of Fox and the early Friends, as more than one discriminating critic has maintained, a not dissimilar trait may be found in Milton. Michael and Adam are celebrating the

* So far as we know, Cromwell had but slight knowledge of Milton or of his views. He was not at all a man of extensive reading, but one of enormous executive and administrative force, resembling in both of these traits Washington, whose library was meagre enough according to the standards of our day.

first festival of hospitality in Paradise, provided by Eve, and waited upon by her with the perfection of grace:

> Thus when with meats and drinks they had sufficed,
> * * sudden mind arose
> In Adam not to let the occasion pass,
> Given him by this great conference, to know
> Of things above his world, and of their being
> Who dwell in Heaven.
>
> (P. L., V., 451–6.)

So very tactfully he makes inquiry:

> To whom the wingèd Hierarch replied:—
> "O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
> All things proceed, and up to him return,
> If not depraved from good, created all
> Such to perfection, one first matter all,
> Endued with various forms, various degrees
> Of substance, and, in things that live, of life;
> But more refined, more spiritous and pure,
> As nearer to him placed or nearer tending,
> Each in their several active spheres assigned,
> Till body up to spirit work."
>
> (P. L., V., 468–78.)

IV

No treatise which purports to set forth Milton's creed can leave unrecorded his utterance on the theme of love. I would not have this statement taken with too literal interpretation, but may it not be accepted, as a general proposition, that the fineness of a man's nature is accurately gauged by his estimate of women, and of that passion which at the same time regulates their destiny and his own?

> "Love [says Raphaël] refines
> The thoughts, and heart enlarges; hath his seat

In Reason, and is judicious; is the scale
By which to Heavenly love thou may'st ascend."
(P. L., VIII., 589–92.)

We may be grateful to our primitive great Sire that he did not permit this occasion to pass without deriving all the enlightenment possible on a theme of such importance to us all. So the conversation continues:

To whom, thus half abashed, Adam replied:
* * * * * *
"To love thou blam'st me not; for love, thou say'st,
Leads up to Heaven, is both the way and guide;
Bear with me, then, if lawful what I ask.
Love not the Heavenly Spirits, and how their love
Express they?" * * * *
To whom the Angel, with a smile that glowed
Celestial rosy-red, love's proper hue,
Answered: "Let it suffice thee that thou know'st
Us happy, and without Love no happiness."
(P. L., VIII., 612–21.)

It is a very engaging trait of the archangel that in his embarrassment at this inquiry he should have blushed like a maiden, and it is in dramatic keeping with the statement of the First Book,* that the angels could at will enact either male or female rôle as it suited them; how would the joys of Paradise be complete if either were excluded from the peculiar satisfactions of the other? It is left to Adam, with exemplary wisdom, in a conference with Eve, to sum up the matter:

"For smiles from reason flow,
* * and are of love the food—
Love, not the lowest end of human life.

* P. L., I., 423–4.

> For not to irksome toil, but to delight,
> He made us, and delight to reason joined."
> (P. L., IX., 239–43.)

Into Milton's life, as into Fox's, came the blessed consolation of reverence for good women. Fox's marriage to Margaret Fell, so far as we know, fulfilled every desire of the affections. Nor was Milton denied this solace. His first marriage was without doubt a failure, —we have sufficient evidence of that,—but his second marriage was crowned with fullest happiness; and the exquisite characterization of woman, in the Fourth Book and in the Seventh Book of *Paradise Lost,* demonstrates his appreciation of her noblest traits. What more adorable praise than the description of the newly created Eve, with "obsequious majesty approved," with "coy submission, modest pride"! She, saith the poet,—

> With lowliness majestic from her seat,
> And grace that won who saw to wish her stay,
> Rose, and went forth among her fruits and flowers.
> * * * * *
> With goddess-like demeanour forth she went,
> Not unattended; for on her as queen
> A pomp of winning Graces waited still,
> And from about her shot darts of desire
> Into all eyes, to wish her still in sight.
> (P. L., VIII., 42–63.)

Adam's praise is at once tender and discriminating:

> "In every gesture dignity and love.
> * * * * *
> Authority and Reason on her wait,
> * * and to consúmmate all,
> Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat

Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her, as a guard angelic placed."
(P. L., VIII., 489–559.)

Is there in the whole wonderful treasury of sonnets, one more sweetly touching than the last of Milton's, in honour of her whom he had never seen?

Methought I saw my late espoused saint
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,
Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
Rescued from Death by force, though pale and faint.
Mine, as whom washed from spot of child-bed taint
Purification in the Old Law did save,
And such as yet once more I trust to have
Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind.
Her face was veiled; yet to my fancied sight
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
So clear as in no face with more delight:
But, oh! as to embrace me she inclined,
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.
(Sonnet XXIII.)

As Milton's blindness made possible that concentration of intellectual energy, and of life in the world of imagination, from which sprang *Paradise Lost,* the *Regained,* and the *Agonistes,* so it is not impossible that in the later period of his life, the absence of the deepest affection, of that which thrills the soul, may have made it easier for him to live in the spirit world, and have enabled him, for the delectation and sustenance of all that innumerable host who have partaken of his thought, to create the Celestial City, and the Paradise of our first parents. Such are the compensations mysteriously provided for the children of men; would they scale the

heights of Dante or of Milton, it may be that the concrete heaven of passionate compliance should be rather of memory than of daily and hindering contact.

A recent essayist* has quoted with effect, in connection with Milton's name, the famous phrase of his contemporary, Archbishop Laud, wherein with happy characterization he speaks of "the beauty of holiness." To the fascination of that appeal not even George Herbert responded with quicker sympathy or in more certain accord than did Milton. Not even to Herbert, kneeling in ascetic devotion, was the charm of that beauty more fascinating and more irresistible than to this very human and far from ascetic moralist and scholar and poet. Both were men of the highest refinement of mind, of noble and exalted intelligence, and of stainless morality; but an extraordinary difference separated them in temperament, one of them withdrawing in sensitive and shrinking aloofness from those delights which appeal to the normal and healthy man, the other finding satisfaction in them all, ever tempered by perfectly wholesome and sane intellectual control and power of will, arising from legitimate contact with things of sense, refreshed and strengthened as the giant in Grecian mythology from contact with his mother Earth.

The close communion of Fox with those among whom his life was cast was a satisfaction denied to Milton. No truer word was ever spoken of him than that—

> His soul was like a star and dwelt apart.

Milton's field came to be the vast realm of meditation and of scholarship,—in his moods of concentration up-

* Mr. Henry A. Beers.

lifted beyond ordinary human intercourse, a realm where excellence was to be achieved only as he was able—

To scorn delights and live laborious days.

Even in the chastened pleasure derived from the communion of the saints, communion in the spiritual life of the men and women about him, wherein doubtless Fox found deep refreshment, it was not Milton's fortune to partake. Only as he brooded long and alone on themes of celestial grandeur were *Paradise Lost* and the *Agonistes* at last achieved. We must accept the result as we find it, and esteem Milton fortunate among the first of our race that he could find companionship in solitary converse:

> But with such thoughts
> Accompanied of things past and to come
> Lodged in his breast as well might recommend
> Such solitude before choicest society.
>
> (P. R., I., 299–302.)

> "Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise, or blame; nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a [life] so noble."
>
> (S. A., 1721–4.)

The men and women, united in a common interest, whose enthusiasm Fox aroused, besides adopting for themselves as a designation the name "Children of Light," also took comfort to their souls in being known as the "Friends of Truth." Among them, largely through the controlling power of their leader, there prevailed the closest communion of spirit, so that the designation afterwards adopted, the "Society of Friends,"

was peculiarly appropriate; "unity" was the seal of brotherhood. In their deliberations, there was a suave acquiescence in the prevailing sentiment,—this was accepted as the "sense of the meeting," arrived at in a mood of surrender to the guidance of the inner light. No ballot was needed as a test of unanimity. The ministry of any individual was acceptable in so far as it partook of this brooding sentiment of solidarity, which Maeterlinck, with a poet's insight, has expounded in his luminous essay on the Bee. This latter-day philosopher makes frequent mention of the "spirit of the hive," communicated in some mysterious way to all its members. In a Friends' meeting there was such singleness of purpose, such conscientious desire to achieve the pure fraternity of the spirit, that complete agreement was arrived at, and the judgment of the entire congregation became almost like that of a single individual. The analogy with Maeterlinck's hive is very close indeed.

The Society of Friends long regarded themselves as a "peculiar people": peculiar in the sense that their minds were concentrated upon the things of the spiritual life, and also peculiar by reason of their disregard of the usual *agréments* of the world. Had the injunction of the Archangel been intended for each one of them, it could not have been more appropriately conceived:

> To whom thus Michael: "Judge not what is best
> By pleasure, though to Nature seeming meet,
> Created, as thou art, to nobler end,
> Holy and pure, conformity divine."
>
> (P. L., XI., 603–6.)

With special fitness might be applied to the Friends of Fox's time the designation of the descendants of Seth:

"That sober race of men, whose lives
Religious titled them the Sons of God."
(P. L., XI., 621–2.)

Nor does it altogether violate probabilities to assume that certain of those in whom meekness did least prevail may have arrogated to themselves the commendation of that "gracious Voice Divine" in *Paradise Lost:*

"Some I have chosen of peculiar grace,
Elect above the rest."
(P. L., III., 183–4.)

By the singleness of their aspirations were they separated from the "world's people." Their worship was of one Supreme Being, more often addressed by them as "Our Father" than by the more awful designation of "God." Each devout Friend would literally accept the word of Michael to Adam:

"Yet doubt not but in valley and in plain
God is, as here, and will be found alike
Present, and of his presence many a sign,
Still following thee, still compassing thee round
With goodness and paternal love."
(P. L., XI., 349–53.)

Those who worshipped Him did so "in spirit and in truth"; the mediation of the Virgin Mary, or of any saint, would have seemed to the devout Friend, as it seemed to Milton, an act of indirectness, and a sign of weakness and vacillation, such as could not be tolerated or condoned by any one who relied strictly upon the unfailing justice and upon the omniscience of his supermundane Father.

V

MILTON'S feeling in regard to Christ, as created by God in exactly the same way that the angels of Heaven and that man were created by him, is revealed in the scene in Paradise where God converses with Adam on the day in which he led him to that place of blissful habitation. A note, half of playfulness, in "the Omnific Word" is here very agreeable as addressed to this youth, abounding in health and pleasantness and new-created energy:

> "A nice and subtle happiness, I see,
> Thou to thyself proposest, in the choice
> Of thy associates, Adam, and wilt taste
> No pleasure, though in pleasure, solitary.
> What think'st thou then of me, and this my state?
> Seem I to thee sufficiently possessed
> Of happiness, or not? who am alone
> From all eternity; for none I know
> Second to me or like, equal much less.
> How have I then with whom to hold converse,
> Save with the creatures which I made, and those
> To me inferior, infinite descents
> Beneath what other creatures are to thee?"
>
> (P. L., VIII., 399–411.)

At the very opening of *Paradise Lost* Milton strikes a note which is consistently maintained to the end of that poem, and throughout *Paradise Regained* and the *Agonistes* as well, that Christ is man, only with a greater share of the divine nature; and both Milton and Fox felt very strongly that in every man was a portion of the divine principle, the "inner light," or God made manifest in man. To them Christ was the "greater

man," a circumstance of which the poet takes care to inform us at the very start:

> Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden Tree whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
> With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
> Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
> Sing, Heavenly Muse.
>
> (P. L., I., 1–6.)

> I, who erewhile the Happy Garden sung
> By one man's disobedience lost, now sing
> Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
> By one man's firm obedience fully tried.
>
> (P. R., I., 1–4.)

And a little later, Satan directs his steps to the "coast of Jordan,"—

> Where he might likeliest find this new-declared,
> This man of men, attested Son of God.
>
> (P. R., I., 121–2.)

Christ was the Son of God; every person who approaches his Creator in the right mood of devotion is also a son of God. In this same poem we are assured, in the words of Satan, unrebuked, that—

> "Sons of God both Angels are and Men:
> * * * * * *
> All men are sons of God."
>
> (P. R., IV., 197, 520.)

Milton's fearless mind relentlessly carried this conception to its logical conclusion. No one will maintain that the fallen Lucifer lacked in courage, whatever his other failings may have been; he dares say to Christ, with entire dramatic fitness,—

"The son of God I also am, or was;
And if I was, I am; relation stands."
(P. R., IV., 518–19.)

Christ, in his intercession for man, in *Paradise Lost*,—words addressed to the "Great Creator,"—founds his plea upon the circumstance that man also is the son of God:

"Thy creature late so loved, thy youngest son."
(P. L., III., 151.)

The poet's conception of Christ was not dissimilar to that of Fox; both were Hebraic in the sense that they believed in one God, rather than in a trinity of Gods. With Fox as with Milton everything emanated from God, a single God, and was created by him: "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."

In *Paradise Regained*, as we have seen, the poet makes mention of

This man of men, attested Son of God;
(P. R., I., 122.)

and a little further on in the same poem, the Eternal Father, in his most amiable mood,—

In full frequence bright
Of Angels, thus to Gabriel smiling spake:
* * * "I have chose
This perfect man, by merit called my Son,
To earn salvation for the sons of men."
(P. R., I., 128–9, 165–7.)

It is perfectly true that the Friends from the beginning accepted as a dogma the doctrine of the atonement, but in a more or less perfunctory way; it was not by any

means the foundation-stone of their belief, but something secondary and relatively unimportant. Just as in their worship they could dispense with the Virgin Mary, in like manner they could, in full confidence and without the mediation of Christ, of his mother, or of the saints, approach their Father in Heaven. They were his children and came to him without fear. So long as man had God in his heart and was directed by the inner light, as Christ before him had been so directed, it was not necessary in order to wash away his sins to have recourse to the atoning blood of the Redeemer. As the love of God for his Son was infinite, so the confidence of each one, who in meekness and sincerity laid his petition before the "throne of Justice," was unbounded. To have asked the mediation of the Son of God, or of his Virgin Mother, would have seemed to a follower of Fox, as to Milton, an act unworthy of a spirit whose reliance upon his Father in Heaven was at the same time untainted by doubt, was absolute and complete. The part of a man was to stand before his Creator, and to rely in absolute confidence upon his understanding of that being whom he had created in his own image, and had endowed with faculties only a little lower than the angels; a creature whom it was his intention ultimately to transform into an angel himself and to make a denizen of the celestial city.

The poet's belief, as crystallized in the speech of Michael in his final instruction to Adam before leaving Paradise, is identical with that of the "Friends of Truth," the reliance of children on their Father's love:

> "So Law appears imperfect, and but given
> With purpose to resign them, in full time,

Up to a better covenant, * *
* * * from servile fear
To filial, works of law to works of faith."
(P. L., XII., 300–6.)

VI

In an earlier passage of *Paradise Lost* the poet places in the mouth of the Almighty words of deepest import, the utterance of God, and the belief of Milton as it was of Fox:

"For I will clear their senses dark,
What may suffice, and soften stony hearts
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.
* * * * *
And I will place within them as a guide
My umpire Conscience; whom if they will hear,
Light after light well used they shall attain,
And to the end persisting safe arrive."
(P. L., III., 188–97.)

With the Friends, the "inner light," the dictates of conscience, and unswerving conscientiousness became the ruling passion of their existence; for this they bore obloquy and imprisonment. When the parents were thrown into jail, the children assembled in the deserted meeting-houses and sat in silent worship. Instead of resistance they offered the hardest of all things to overcome, complete passivity and non-resistance, the firm inertia of unyielding submission,—that which seemed to them, when contrasted with opposition to authority,—

The better fortitude
Of patience and heroic martyrdom.
(P. L., IX., 31–2.)

No mental reservations of any sort occurred to their minds, they had the absolute, unfaltering reliance of a child; their faith was untainted by the slightest scintilla of doubt; they believed literally that God was in their midst, and that the "inner light" was the emanation of his presence. Rewards and punishments were not relegated to a future and uncertain state; man's earthly life they believed was also the life of the spirit. Each person was a living spirit, as fully so when alive, with God in his heart, as when dead and comfortably buried. The dilemma of existence caused them no anxiety whatever. Either the immortal soul of each of them reflected the beatitudes of Christ while they lived and went about their daily affairs, or that soul could not exist after death. This position seemed to them logical and unanswerable.

Milton, both by the mouth of God and of Satan, expounds this theme. In the Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost,* Lucifer, in prospect of Eden, holds communion with himself, betraying with tragic force his own elevation of mind; though he has sinned, yet is his nature still celestial, and it is through his godlike attributes that the severity of his punishment is accomplished. We listen to his meditation with commiseration, as for one caught in the toils of fate:

> "Oh, had his powerful destiny ordained
> Me some inferior Angel, I had stood
> Then happy; no unbounded hope had raised
> Ambition. * * *
> * * Which way shall I fly
> Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
> Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell."
> (P. L., IV., 58–75.)

Earlier in this book we find the same thought more fully elaborated:

> Now conscience wakes despair
> That slumbered; wakes the bitter memory
> Of what he was, what is, and what must be
> Worse; of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensue!
> (P. L., IV., 23–26.)

There is a curious passage describing Satan's approach to Eve in Paradise, where she is discovered alone, tending her flowers:

> Herself, though fairest unsupported flower,
> From her best prop so far, and storm so nigh.
> (P. L., IV., 432–3.)

In this is revealed the sort of respect in which Milton held merely passive morality, the *vis inertiæ* of conventional timidity:

> Her heavenly form
> Angelic, but more soft and feminine,
> Her graceful innocence, her every air
> Of gesture, or least action, overawed
> His malice, and with rapine sweet bereaved
> His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:
> That space the Evil One abstracted stood
> From his own evil, and for the time remained
> *Stupidly good.*
> (P. L., IX., 457–65.)

May I pause long enough to emphasize the characterization? The poet proceeds,—

> [Satan remained] of enmity disarmed,
> Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge.
> But the hot hell that always in him burns,
> Though in mid Heaven, soon ended his delight.
> (P. L., IX., 465–68.)

The Grace of God is the theme of the *Paradise Regained,* and from the point of view of a theologian it is this quality as reflected in the Son of God which is the redeeming feature of *Paradise Lost;* without it, Jehovah,—

> Omnipotent,
> Immutable, Immortal, Infinite,
> Eternal King,—
>
> (P. L., III., 372–4.)

would stand forth almost as relentless as Moloch. The Chorus of the *Agonistes,* like that of the Greek tragedy accurately reflecting the sentiment of the bystanders, refers to him, in terms of highest reverence and praise, as "our living Dread." (*S. A.,* 1673.) Christian theology has moved far since those words were penned. The angels, says the Almighty,—

> "By their own suggestion fell,
> Self-tempted, self-depraved; Man falls deceived
> By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace;
> The other, none. In mercy and justice both,
> Through Heaven and Earth, so shall my glory excel;
> But mercy, first and last, shall brightest shine."
>
> (P. L., III., 129–34.)

We thank Milton's God for that note. It has been said of the profession of law that in its ranks may be found two classes of men,—those who possess the "legal mind" and those who have also the "human mind." This was a sweetly human, or as we say when we especially wish to emphasize any trait of human perfection, a "divine" trait; but the finest quality of godlike humility is ever in the words of Christ:

> Thus while God spake ambrosial fragrance filled
> All Heaven, and in the blessed Spirits elect

Sense of new joy ineffable diffused.
Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious; in him all his Father shone
Substantially expressed; and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appeared,
Love without end, and without measure grace;
Which uttering, thus he to his Father spake:
"O Father, gracious was that word which closed
Thy sovran sentence, that Man should find grace;
For which both Heaven and Earth shall high extol
Thy praises, with the innumerable sound
Of hymns and sacred songs, wherewith thy throne
Encompassed shall resound thee ever blest.
For should Man finally be lost, should Man,
Thy creature late so loved, thy youngest son,
Fall circumvented thus by fraud, though joined
With his own folly? that be from thee far,
That far be from thee, Father, who art judge
Of all things made, and judgest only right!"
(P. L., III., 135–55.)

VII

When *Paradise Lost* was composed Milton had been six years blind; quite sufficient time had elapsed for him, under his limitations, to have evolved the most effective methods of intellectual work. A controlling passion made sustained work a necessity to him. In *The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty,* written soon after his Italian journey, he has admitted us to his confidence about this; he makes note of his life being spent in "labour and intense study, which," he says, "I take to be my portion in this life."

He has informed us that only between the autumnal and the vernal equinox did his poetic genius fructify. Aubrey records that the poet's nephew had told him of

his uncle, that: "His vein never happily flowed but from the autumnal equinoctial to the vernal, and that whatever he attempted otherwise was never to his satisfaction, though he courted his fancy never so much, so that in all the years he was about this poem, he may be said to have spent but half the time therein." When, however, the poet was in the vein of composition, it was his belief that some power above his own brought to his mind full-formed the exact words of his "unpremeditated verse." He implores the Heavenly Muse to

> Inspire,
> As thou art wont, my prompted song, else mute.
> (P. R., I., 11–12.)

The words of the poem came into his mind most often in the stillness of the night, and then with a firm and perfectly accurate memory he retained passages of twenty or of forty lines until some one could write them down for him. Of course the written page he never saw, and it is not strange that peculiarities of punctuation, in some cases affecting the sense, should exist. Even Landor,—upon the whole, it seems to me, the ablest critic who has expounded Milton, with a mind most nearly of Miltonic strength,—even he forgets that peculiarities of spelling and punctuation lay beyond the scope of the author's revision. Milton, after his blindness, always arranged his habitations so as to have access to a garden, and walking in this he spent several hours daily. This exercise was his source of physical refreshment, and during these periods, also, passages of the poem must have shaped themselves in his mind.

The subject of direct inspiration in his poetic composition is more than once referred to by him. At the be-

ginning of *Paradise Lost,* after the invocation to the Heavenly Muse, he adds this prayer for assistance, addressed to the same Divine Spirit:

> And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
> Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
> Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
> Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,
> Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss,
> And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
> Illumine, what is low raise and support;
> That to the height of this great argument,
> I may assert Eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to men.
>
> (P. L., I., 17–26.)

Fox believed that he was directed of God in his mission, that literally and specifically he was guided by the Spirit of God to preach or to refrain from preaching. Milton had exactly the same idea in regard to his poetry. Bishop Newton has informed us that he had been himself told by persons who had conversed with Milton's widow that the poet looked upon himself as "inspired." She was asked "Whether he did not often read Homer and Virgil; she understood it as an imputation upon him for stealing from those authors, and answered with eagerness, that he stole from nobody but the Muse who inspired him; and being asked by a lady present who the Muse was, replied, it was God's grace and the Holy Spirit that visited him nightly." *

In the Second Book of *The Reason of Church Govern-*

* *Life of Milton,* by Bishop Newton, prefixed to his edition of *Paradise Lost,* 1749. Elizabeth Milton, we know, was young—less than half the age of the poet when he married her. She had golden hair, was kind, and made her husband's heart to sing for joy,—even though he was blind and

ment, where Milton alludes to his purpose of some day writing a great poem, he gives expression to this same idea; the achievement of such a task "was not to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge; and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases." In the same tract occurs a very noble passage in which the theme is more fully expounded: "These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every nation; and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility; to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church; to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship. Lastly, whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable or grave, whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all the changes of that which is called fortune from without, or the wily subtleties and refluxes of man's thoughts from within; all these things with a solid and treatable smoothness to paint out and describe; teaching over the

had the gout, Aubrey informs us, he used to sing,—but she had not the equipment of a literary mind; nor was this a part of Eve's seductive charm!

whole book of sanctity and virtue, through all the instances of example."*

Elsewhere, in a passage of personal and pathetic import, Milton invokes the same divine spirit, under the name of Urania, the muse of the celestial spheres, a designation itself signifying in pagan mythology "the Heavenly One":

> Descend from Heaven, Urania, by that name
> If rightly thou art called, whose voice divine
> Following, above the Olympian hill I soar,
> Above the flight of Pegasean wing!
> The meaning, not the name, I call; for thou
> Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
> Of old Olympus dwell'st; but, Heavenly-born,
> Before the hills appeared or fountain flowed,
> Thou with eternal Wisdom didst converse,
> Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
> In presence of the Almighty Father, pleased
> With thy celestial song. Up led by thee,
> Into the Heaven of Heavens I have presumed,
> An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
> Thy tempering: with like safety guided down,
> Return me to my native element.
>
> * * * * *
>
> More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
> To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,
> On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,
> In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,
> And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
> Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn
> Purples the east. Still govern thou my song,
> Urania, and fit audience find, though few.
>
> (P. L., VII., 1–31.)

And still again, in a later passage in *Paradise Lost,* he refers to aid brought him from some power beyond the

* *Reason of Church Government,* Prose Works, II., 479–80.

reach of human volition, in sleep or in a mood of wise passivity:

> My celestial patroness, who deigns
> Her nightly visitation unimplored,
> And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
> Easy my unpremeditated verse,
> Since first this subject for heroic song
> Pleased me, long choosing and beginning late.
> * * * * *
> Unless an age too late, or cold
> Climate, or years, damp my intended wing
> Depressed; and much they may, if all be mine,
> Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear.
>
> (P. L., IX., 21–47.)

Sometimes one is bidden by the inner voice to speak that which will be unpleasing to the ear which must perforce listen to the message:

> When God commands to take the trumpet
> And blow a dolorous or a jarring blast,
> It lies not in man's will what he shall say,
> Or what he shall conceal.*

VIII

MILTON, in the earlier part of his career,—for instance, when he wrote the *Tractates on Divorce,*—believed in

* From Milton's prose, not written in the form of verse, but embedded like gold in quartz, and quoted, evidently from memory and inaccurately, by Landor in the *Imaginary Conversations; Milton and Marvel;* Landor's Works, 1876, V., 152.

"*Marvel:* Isaiah seems to be speaking.

"*Milton:* The only resemblance is that Isaiah spoke in vain."

In this dialogue Milton is made to say that poetry should not be allowed to invade the domain of prose:

"*Milton:* We should keep them distinct, however impetuous may be the loftier and the stronger.

"*Marvel:* If you could have done it, we should have lost the grandest piece of harmony that ever was uttered from the heart of man."

The reference is to the passage quoted above. *Rea. of Ch. Gov.,* Pr. W., II., 474.

predestination, and he presents various arguments in support of his position. According to the prevailing belief of the day, some persons were born elect, some were foredoomed to sin,—

> "As if predestination overruled
> Their will."
>
> (P. L., III., 114–15.)

Age, fortunately, brought to him wisdom and a creed more tempered with mercy. When *Paradise Lost* was shaping itself in his mind he had become emancipated from this bondage to austere Calvinism, whose blight caused to the noblest of that age torments of introspection and despair. Many a devout Calvinist must have reckoned as the chief of his afflictions these brooding thoughts of the future; they poured upon him, "a deadly swarm of hornets armed," till, like the blind Samson, he would cry aloud in his distress—

> "Thoughts, my tormentors, armed with deadly stings,
> * * * * *
> Thence faintings, swoonings of despair,
> And sense of Heaven's desertion."
>
> (S. A., 623–32.)

As one might naturally expect, the freedom of the will presents itself for consideration, since on that tragic endowment depends the whole welfare of mankind. The militant Archangel was sent by God to confer with our first parent:

> "Go, therefore, half this day, as friend with friend,
> Converse with Adam, * *
> * * and such discourse bring on
> As may advise him of his happy state—

Happiness in his power left free to will,
Left to his own free will, his will though free
Yet mutable." * * * *
So spake the Eternal Father, and fulfilled
All justice.

(P. L., V., 229–47.)

Michael is entertained sumptuously in Paradise; and exquisite Eve provides for her little party, and waits upon their needs with a grace which captivates the courtly visitant.* Then they fall into discourse, and Adam interrogates:

"But say
What meant that caution joined, *If ye be found*
Obedient?" * * * *
To whom the Angel:—"Son of Heaven and Earth,
Attend! That thou art happy, owe to God;
That thou continuest such, owe to thyself,
That is, to thy obedience; therein stand:
This was the caution given thee; be advised.
God made thee perfect, not immutable;
And good he made thee, but to persevere
He left it in thy power—ordained thy will
By nature free, not over-ruled by fate
Inextricable, or strict necessity."

(P. L., V., 513–28.)

When *Paradise Lost* was composed, the freedom of the will had come in the poet's mind to be that trait of our endowment which as clearly as any other revealed its heavenly origin. Even the fallen angels could be induced to follow the "Prince of the air" only by reason of the very fineness of their nature. Fallen they were,

* I cannot deny myself the pleasure of a quotation from Landor, if only as a tribute to his greatness. "Let us," he says, "rise to Eve. * * * The great poet is always greatest at this beatific vision." Landor, *Imaginary Conversations*, IV., 34.

but from what noble defect! If the Son of Morn was moved by pride, by envy, and by ambition, yet must he win his followers through their most divine attributes. Never was it more clearly shown that—

> Spirits are not finely touched
> But to fine issues.

The hosts of heaven are beguiled to a distant place, and Lucifer makes his appeal to them with consummate tact; it is an appeal directed against tyranny, between which and their godlike nature he well knows that there exists an instinctive and ineradicable antipathy:

> "Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend
> The supple knee? * * * *
> * * If not equal all, yet free,
> Equally free."
>
> (P. L., V., 787–92.)

He uses the exact argument which with Satanic intuition he knows will prove irresistible. In like mood afterwards, among the seraphim, is hurled the taunt to the seraph Abdiel:

> "At first I thought that liberty and Heaven
> To heavenly souls had been all one; but now
> I see that most through sloth had rather serve!"
>
> (P. L., VI., 164–6.)

The words of Samson to the remonstrating Chorus might well have been spoken by Lucifer, the champion of liberty:

> "Commands are no constraints. If I obey them
> I do it freely."
>
> (S. A., 1372–3.)

The poet's devotion to the great Protector, and to the causes which his name represents, finds an echo in spite of himself in his delineation of the "Prince of Hell,"—of Lucifer,

> "Brighter once amidst the host
> Of Angels than that star the stars among."
> (P. L., VII., 132–3.)

> "He, of the first,
> If not the first Archangel."
> (P. L., V., 659–60.)

> "Great indeed
> His name, and high was his degree in Heaven:
> His countenance, as the morning-star that guides
> The starry flock, allured them, and with lies,
> Drew after him the third part of Heaven's host."
> (P. L., V., 706–10.)

If this chief among the cherubim fell through pride, his followers, a third part of the heavenly choir, fell through love of liberty instilled by their leader and through loyalty to him; for his delinquency were they banished to Hell, and for him they suffered punishment.

The same passion rules the poet's age that guided his youth. Strangely enough, Lucifer in the poem has this trait in common with the delicious lady of Comus, who replies to the magician's threat of turning her to stock or stone,—

> "Fool, do not boast.
> Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind
> With all thy charms."
> (Comus, 663–5.)

The term "predestination," of course, had, in Calvinistic theology, only a merciful significance, applying

solely to those born to be saved. Milton, in *Paradise Lost,* does not use the similar and correlated term, "reprobation," applying to such as were foreordained to eternal woe; like Fox, he came to believe that such a cruel doom for those who through their frailty err was not decreed by God. Milton does, however, speak of "spirits reprobate," * and there still lingered in his mind from the days of his youth the belief that good angels were always about us, and that each of us had one of these from his birth assigned to protect him and to guide his steps.

There is a very peculiar passage indeed in *Paradise Lost,* and one not altogether easy to reconcile with the general scheme of the celestial hierarchy as set forth by the poet. It occurs in the conversation between Adam and Eve during that first day in Paradise which we are permitted to share with them. They are in the sweetest accord, and Eve, after a most adorable confession of her love for Adam, has asked why, all night long, the myriad stars continue to shine while they are both asleep and so unable to derive pleasure from their contemplation. Adam's reply is startling with its reference to invisible creatures surrounding their path, spirits that could hardly be escaped angels, if one may so refer to denizens of the Celestial City, and certainly were not spirits from Hell, since Lucifer had come thence unattended, and since—on his way returning—he had met the next to follow in his path, the fell shapes of Sin and Death. The stay in Paradise of our first parents had been brief, but

* *P. L.,* I., 697. "Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." *Daniel,* XII., 10.

already Adam was conscious of mysterious companionship:

"These [stars] though unbeheld in deep of night,
Shine not in vain. Nor think, though men were none,
That Heaven would want spectators, God want praise.
Millions of spiritual creatures walk the Earth
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep:
* * How often, from the steep
Of echoing hill or thicket, have we heard
Celestial voices to the midnight air,
Sole, or responsive each to other's note,
Singing their great Creator! Oft in bands
While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,
With heavenly touch of instrumental sounds
In full harmonic number joined, their songs
Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to Heaven."
(P. L., IV., 674–88.)

And again, when the patriarch of mankind is holding conference with the archangel, he refers to the same phenomenon:

"Thy words
Attentive, and with more delightful ear,
Divine instructor, I have heard, than when
Cherubic songs by night from neighbouring hills
Aërial music send."
(P. L., V., 544–8.)

These verses bring to mind that thrilling passage in *Comus* where creatures of the air crowd, and clamour for recognition:

"A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes, * * *
And airy tongues that syllable men's names
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses."
(Comus, 205–9.)*

* This last verse has a hiss that is in itself fitted to arouse apprehension.

Alike in youth and age Milton believed in spirits about us, and more than once makes mention of a special angel assigned at his birth to protect each individual. The Latin epigram written at Rome in honour of Leonora Baroni refers to this guardian spirit: "To every one, so let the natives believe, there is allotted, from among the ethereal ranks, his own winged angel."* And long after, in the *Agonistes,* he gives expression to the same idea,—the Chorus bids Samson:

> "Go, and the Holy One
> Of Israel * * *
> Send thee the Angel of thy birth, to stand
> Fast by thy side, who from thy father's field
> Rode up in flames after his message told
> Of thy conception."
>
> (S. A., 1427–34.)

In telling his readers of the giant "causey" built by Sin and Death, the poet describes it as a "passage broad"—

> By which the Spirits perverse
> With easy intercourse pass to and fro
> To tempt or punish mortals, except whom
> God and good Angels guard by special grace.
>
> (P. L., II., 1030–33.)

This was in accordance with the merciful doctrine of predestination.

The matter of the freedom of the will recurs many times in *Paradise Lost;* almost the first communication made by God to man, after his creation, is to assure him of this freedom from constraint:

> "Thus far to try thee, Adam, I was pleased,
> And find thee knowing not of beasts alone,
> * * * but of thyself,

* Masson's translation.

Expressing well the spirit within thee free,
My image, not imparted to the brute."

(P. L., VIII., 437–41.)

Again, in the Third Book, we find recorded the word of God to his only-begotten Son. The Almighty is contemplating from a distance the flight of Satan to the new-created world, and takes especial pains to disclaim all responsibility for human infirmity:

"Man will hearken to his glozing lies,
And * * * so will fall.
* * * Whose fault?
Whose but his own? * * *
* * * I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all the ethereal powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who failed:
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
Of true allegiance, constant faith or love?
* * What praise could they receive,
What pleasure I, from such obedience paid,
When will and reason—reason also is choice—
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
Made passive both, had served necessity,
Not me?"

(P. L., III., 93–111.)

In this passage is there not discernible to the discriminating ear a slightly apologetic note, as if Milton's God were in his own mind somewhat ashamed of having created man vulnerable and so doomed to err? One naturally feels a certain shock of surprise at finding the Almighty himself engaged in justifying the ways of God to man. A little further on he cannot refrain from betraying his own disappointment at the imperfection of

that being whom he has so recently created, and with such sanguine hope. Almost he excites our pity as he murmurs in contemplating man,—

"How frail
His fallen condition!"
(P. L., III., 180–1.)

Confirming this criticism, it may be noted that in the *Argument* to the book in which the passage occurs, the poet, as if strengthening the thought there elaborated, states that "God * * * clears his own justice and wisdom from all imputation, having created Man free, and able to have withstood his Tempter." The passage quoted is the more significant from the circumstance that it was written three or five years later than the lines of the poem to which it refers, and was inserted by Milton when the first edition was more than half through the press, as a sort of afterthought to reinforce that which most needed support. The theologian in him felt the necessity of insisting with especial emphasis upon the fact that God was just, and that man was free though doomed. In the *Argument* to Book V., there is a passage concise yet significant. "God," says the poet, "to render man inexcusable, sends Raphael to admonish him of * * * his free estate"; that phrase,—"to render man inexcusable,"—is as relentless as Calvin or as Knox himself could have desired. There is not lacking in this a certain note of cruelty, abhorrent to a more sensitive and to a more lukewarm age. "Necessity and Chance," says the Almighty,—

"Approach not me, and what I will is Fate."
(P. L., VII., 172–3.)

IX

LET us for a moment consider the closing verses of *Paradise Lost,* where Milton gives the summing up of the whole matter, conceived in a mood of elevation which has come as the solace of his blindness and of his loneliness, a consummation of his lifelong purpose. Michael has foretold the calamities of the church:

> "Wolves shall succeed for teachers, grievous wolves";
> (P. L., XII., 508.)

an echo of that fierce outburst of indignation found in *Lycidas,* written two full decades before, where he scarifies such as

> "Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!
> * * * * * *
> Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
> A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least
> That to the faithful herdman's art belongs!"
> (Lycidas, 115–21.)

These—so does the Archangel instruct Adam—shall cloud

> "The truth,
> * * * * *
> Left only in those written records pure,
> Though not but by the Spirit understood."
> (P. L., XII., 511–14.)

> "What the Spirit within
> Shall on the heart engrave."
> (P. L., XII., 523–4.)

> "The Spirit of God, promised alike and given
> To all believers."
> (P. L., XII., 519–20.)

He ended; and thus Adam last replied:—
* * * * *
"Greatly instructed I shall hence depart,
Greatly in peace of thought: * *
Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,
And love with fear the only God, to walk
As in his presence. * * *
* * * With good
Still overcoming evil, * *
* * By things deemed weak
Subverting worldly-strong, and worldly-wise
By simply meek; that suffering for truth's sake
Is fortitude to highest victory."
* * * * *
To whom thus also the Angel last replied:
"This having learned, thou hast attained the sum
Of Wisdom."
(P. L., XII., 552–76.)

The doctrine of the inner light is more than suggested in these passages. Dr. Rufus Jones has concisely stated the importance of the "inner light" in Quaker literature. "One might say that every early Quaker writing is like a palimpsest. Beneath every word which was written this idea of the inner light also lies written. It is the key to every peculiarity in Quakerism."* A reverence for the inner light was almost as much a distinguishing characteristic of Milton as of Fox; the poet's prayer in the opening of the Third Book was only the expression of a sentiment consistent and sustained:

[Do thou,] celestial Light,
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate.
(P. L., III., 51–3.)

* Rufus M. Jones, Litt.D., *Social Law in the Spiritual World*, p. 167.

As we have seen, a favourite designation used by Fox of those who possessed a devout spiritual nature was "Children of Light." Many passages might be cited in illustration of Milton's reverence for the divine light,—for instance, from the *Agonistes:*

> *Semichorus.* "But he, though blind of sight,
> * * * * *
> With inward eyes illuminated."
>
> (S. A., 1687–9.)

Again, in the Fourth Book of *Paradise Regained,* there is a more complete amplification of this idea:

> To whom our Saviour sagely thus replied:—
> * * * "He who receives
> Light from above, from the Fountain of Light,
> No other doctrine needs."
>
> (P. R., IV., 285–90.)

So early as the time of *Comus* he had expressed the same thought:

> "He that has light within his own clear breast
> May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day:
> But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
> Benighted walks under the mid-day sun;
> Himself is his own dungeon."
>
> (Comus, 381–5.)

In *Samson Agonistes* is a passage that must have been autobiographical, a moan of suffering, wrung from the heart of a strong man:

> "O worse than chains,
> Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!
> Light, the prime work of God, to me is extinct."
>
> (S. A., 67–70.)

The very circumstance of Milton's blindness seems to have made light as a symbol of divine energy all the more vivid to the eye of the spirit. The predilection is one, as we have seen, which existed before that calamity overtook him. In that passage of the tragedy which he contemplated writing in dramatic form on the theme of the fall of man, composed in 1642, ten years before blindness finally closed about him, is an eloquent apostrophe to the Sun:

> "O thou that, with surpassing glory crowned,
> Look'st from thy sole dominion like the god
> Of this new World; at whose sight all the stars
> Hide their diminished heads; to thee I call,
> But with no friendly voice, and add thy name,
> O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams,
> That bring to my remembrance from what state
> I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere,
> Till pride and worse ambition threw me down,
> Warring in Heaven against Heaven's matchless King!"
> (P. L., IV., 32–41.)

It would almost seem as if to this great intelligence, groping in darkness, all scenes of grandeur, floating before the inner eye, appeared as shining visions. For instance, when Lucifer had returned from our universe to Pandemonium disguised as a common soldier, and had taken his seat, unobserved, on his own regal throne, his presence was revealed by the lustre of his person as he threw off the disguise:

> Down a while
> He sat, and round about him saw, unseen.
> At last, as from a cloud, his fulgent head
> And shape star-bright appeared. * *
> * * * All amazed

At that so sudden blaze, the Stygian throng
Bent their aspéct, and whom they wished beheld,
Their mighty Chief returned.

(P. L., X., 447–55.)

Great unhappiness came into Milton's life: disappointment in his home; grief from defeat of his dearest aspirations for the liberties of England; loss of money and of friends; and, crowning misfortune of all, darkness and distress. That which he says of one who is blind is pitifully applicable to his own estate:

"In most things as a child
Helpless."

(S. A., 942–3.)

And later the Chorus, in addressing Manoa, gives expression to the poet's own estimate:

"Thou in old age car'st how to nurse thy son,
Made older than thy age through eye-sight lost."

(S. A., 1488–9.)

The whole poem very vividly reflects the limitations of blindness and advancing years:

"But chief of all,
O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!
Blind among enemies! O worse than chains,
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!
Light, the prime work of God, to me is extinct,
And all her various objects of delight
Annulled, which might in part my grief have eased.
* * * * *
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half."

(S. A., 66–79.)

Blindness with him came to be a symbol for complete and abject helplessness, as where, in *Paradise Lost,* God

is endeavouring to justify to himself his ways with men, —is trying to convince himself that he is both just and magnanimous; the Almighty confides to his Divine Son, in hard, unrelenting Calvinistic fashion,—

> "This my long sufferance and my day of grace
> They who neglect and scorn shall never taste;
> But hard be hardened, blind be blinded more,
> That they may stumble on, and deeper fall."
> (P. L., III., 198–201.)

Ah, the pathos of that blindness of the soul!

A passion for light, and a hatred of the dark, controlled him. Those who possess eyesight find comfort in the darkness of the night; it is a rest to their wearied vision. That which to others is a blessed relief, like silence following the tumult of an orchestra, was to him a thing hated and abhorred. In *L'Allegro,* "loathéd Melancholy" is said to be—

> Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born;

and he bids her—

> Find out some uncouth cell,
> Where brooding Darkness spreads her jealous wings.
> (L'Allegro, 5–6.)

In his later poems—most of all, of course, in the *Agonistes*—we find repeated indications of the blind man's passion for light, "the prime work of God." In the Blissful City of *Paradise Lost* night did not exist; the poet, in his horror of that death of the senses, annuls its terrors and qualifies its sombre hues:

"Obsequious darkness enters, till her hour
To veil the Heaven, though darkness there might well
Seem twilight here."
(P. L., VI., 10–12.)

Adam's "propitious guest," in telling of the revolt of the angels, had already expounded to him that—

"The face of brightest Heaven had changed
To grateful twilight (for night comes not there
In darker veil)";
(P. L., V., 644–6.)

and afterwards he characterizes night as "dim" rather than profoundly black:

"Now ere night,
Now ere dim night had disencumbered Heaven."
(P. L., V., 699–700.)

Midnight itself is only "dusky," not black:

"Soon as midnight brought on the dusky hour."
(P. L., V., 667.)

All his life—that is, when he was really alive in the senses, while his faculty of seeing still existed—he had loved the half-light of the evening; he plays with this theme more than once. It may be that darkness itself is but too intense light:

Fountain of light, thyself invisible,
Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sitt'st
Throned inaccessible; but when thou shadest
The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud
Drawn round about thee like a radiant shrine
Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,
Yet dazzle Heaven, that brightest Seraphim
Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes.
(P. L., III., 375–82.)

One of the first and most hateful things, from the poet's point of view, that occurred after the transgression of our first parents, was that the nights became dark and forbidding in their gloom:

> Thus Adam to himself lamenting loud
> Through the still night, not now, as ere Man fell,
> Wholesome and cool and mild, but with black air
> Accompanied, with damps and dreadful gloom;
> Which to his evil conscience represented
> All things with double terror.
>
> (P. L., X., 845–50.)

Darkness, with Milton, came to resemble the sterility of the arctic waste, the equivalent of non-existence, the symbol of death, where, like the open eye of death, all the naked landscape blindly stares at the heavens above. Before all things were created there was naught but darkness; the spark of life and of light are synonymous. When Adam is repining after the fall, in his soliloquy of dejection he reproaches his Creator with having summoned him from darkness into light:

> "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
> To mould me Man? did I solicit thee
> From darkness to promote me, or here place
> In this delicious garden?"
>
> (P. L., X., 743–6.)

X

Milton mentions three orders of light: first, that which appeals to the visual sense, often lauded by him with touching fervour; then, light as a designation of life itself, of human vitality, as where Samson confides to

his father, the aged Manoa, his anticipation of approaching death:

> "These dark orbs no more shall treat with light,
> Nor the other light of life continue long."
>
> (S. A., 591–2.)

And as expressive of his high esteem of light he notes its "speed almost spiritual," * a striking characterization.

Finally, he treats of the spiritual essence of God and of man's soul as light. Samson, at the beginning of the tragedy, soliloquizes:

> "Since light so necessary is to life,
> And almost life itself, if it be true
> That light is in the soul,
> She all [soul] in every part," etc.†
>
> (S. A., 90–3.)

The same idea is confirmed by a passage soon following in the Chorus:

> "Thy soul
> * * * * *
> Imprisoned now indeed,
> In real darkness of the body dwells,
> Shut up from outward light;
> * * * * *
> For inward light, alas!
> Puts forth no visual beam."
>
> (S. A., 156–63.)

In the famous opening to the Third Book of *Paradise Lost* the poet exults in the recollection of this most ex-

* P. L., VIII., 110.

† "He adopts the same view in *Christian Doct.*, Chap. VII., speaking of the soul as 'equally diffused throughout any given whole, and throughout every part of that whole.' P. W., IV., 192." A. W. Verity, M.A., *Notes to S. A.*, 93.

quisite of created things, and tells us that God himself is light:

> Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heaven first-born!
> Or of the Eternal coeternal beam
> May I express thee unblamed? since God is light,
> And never but in unapproachèd light
> Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,
> Bright effluence of bright essence increate!
> Or hear'st thou rather pure Ethereal stream,
> Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the sun,
> Before the Heavens, thou wert, and at the voice
> Of God, as with a mantle, didst invest
> The rising World of waters dark and deep,
> Won from the void and formless infinite.
>
> (P. L., III., 1–12.)

In the description of that supreme moment in Heaven when God prepares to quell the rebel angels, he addresses his only-begotten Son:

> "Effulgence of my glory, Son beloved,
> Son in whose face invisible is beheld
> Visibly, what by Deity I am."
> * * * * *
> He said; and on his Son with rays direct
> Shone full; he all his Father full expressed
> Ineffably into his face received.
>
> (P. L., VI., 680–720.)

There is a curious parallelism between Milton's conception of light and one feature in the description of the Deity, which are carried almost to the point of identical imagery. The abode of light before the creation of the sun, and the abode of God, are in each case a luminous cloud, or nebulous radiance:

> "'Let there be light!' said God; and forthwith light
> Ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure,

Sprung from the Deep, * * *
Sphered in a radiant cloud, for yet the sun
Was not; she in a cloudy tabernacle
Sojourned the while."
(P. L., VII., 243–9.)

Previous to this,—

The Most High
Eternal Father, from his secret cloud
Amidst,—
(P. L., X., 31–3.)

"The invisible King,
Only omniscient,"—
(P. L., VII., 122–3.)

had addressed the "Ethereal people," and, after having committed to the Son the task of judgment, "whether in Heaven, or Earth, or Hell," had made him the partaker of his power, accomplished through the transmission of light:

So spake the Father; and, unfolding bright
Toward the right hand his glory, on the Son
Blazed forth unclouded deity.
(P. L., X., 63–5.)

Milton had brooded long upon this theme, and the incident as described is consistent with another famous passage wherein he expounds the ties of heavenly sympathy and intercommunication. The celestial Cherubin is asked by Adam,—this radiant bridegroom, new-created, whose youthful fancy in springtime naturally turns to thoughts of love,—for more explicit information in regard to that source of delightful agitation which so largely engrosses his mind, and which so amply since that day has occupied the attention of his descendants, and he receives the explicit assurance,—

"Easier than air with air, if Spirits embrace,
Total they mix, union of pure with pure."
(P. L., VIII., 626–7.)

By some mysterious transmission of energy through the medium of light, the virtue of God finds expression in the temperament of the Son. Reflecting his Father's will, he could be relentless toward those who had failed in the performance of duty to God, but beyond that, in him were apparent the more merciful, the more divine, the less inhuman traits of the Hebrew Jehovah.

Elsewhere we find the power of the Son referred to as "lightening divine," a characterization implying attributes which now perhaps made the strongest of all appeals to him, bereft of the solace of light, with wandering steps and slow, groping in darkness. It is found in the narrative of "the sociable Spirit," when he and Adam were holding delightful converse in Paradise:

"To whom the Son, with calm aspect and clear,
Lightening divine, ineffable, serene,
Made answer."
(P. L., V., 734–6.)

The words of the Messiah to the Almighty are an expression of the stern doctrine of the Hebrew faith, to Milton a revelation to be accepted without demur:

"But whom thou hat'st I hate, and can put on
Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on."
(P. L., VI., 734–5.)

And, later, to his assembled army of Saints,—

"So spake the Son and into terror changed
His countenance, too severe to be beheld,
And full of wrath bent on his enemies."
(P. L., VI., 824–6.)

His foes, it will be remembered, were vanquished by a sort of omnipotent magic emanating from a chariot equipped with eyes, an echo of the Apocalypse:

> "And every eye
> Glared lightning, and shot forth pernicious fire."
> (P. L., VI., 848–9.)

It is well for us, however, to bear in mind that the scene here portrayed reveals but one side of the Miltonic mind, unrelenting and Hebraic, stern offspring of the Calvinistic faith; there was another, characterized by the most exquisite sensibility,—as for instance in the description of the sorrow of the angels at man's fall,

> Dim sadness did not spare
> That time celestial visages, yet, mixed
> With pity, violated not their bliss.
> (P. L., X., 23–5.)

It would be hard to find a more angelic trait than that, or the expression of a mind more susceptible to a mood of tenderness. Milton's dramatic equipment gave him a wide range of imaginative conceptions. The mind of Fox was not so catholic; it may be that in his composition the divine attribute of pity made this world in reality a prophecy of the world to come, and cast the beatitudes of the saints about his daily path. Perhaps his temperament was more nearly an echo of the gentle-natured Raphael, confiding to Adam a knowledge of Heaven and of man's abode, and he may well have shared the belief of the Archangel in regard to this vale of tears:

> "Though what if Earth
> Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
> Each to other like, more than on Earth is thought!"
> (P. L., V., 574–6.)

Both Milton and Fox believed that man partook of the divine nature, and that the light of God shone in his heart,—whether it were into that of the Son of Man, or into the hearts of the sons of men, was a matter merely of degree. Both were the Sons of God.

XI

Milton had deliberately persisted in writing the *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio,* although he knew that blindness would be the result. His utterance soon after this calamity overtook him, explaining why he thus persisted, was exactly in the spirit of Fox, who, if he did not court persecution, accepted it with entire equanimity. "I could not," said the poet, "but obey that inward monitor, I know not what, that spoke to me from Heaven." In the same mood the baffled Samson stands firm and unyielding; the officer of the Philistines had given him solemn warning of the effect which his refusal to appear at the feast of Dagon will have upon the Philistine lords:

> "Regard thyself; this will offend them highly."

His reply is an ejaculation of defiance:

> "Myself! my conscience, and internal peace."
> (S. A., 1333–4.)

Again, in *The Reason of Church Government,* he has given utterance to the same thought,—in it is revealed the consecration of his energies: "But were it the meanest under-service, if God by his secretary conscience enjoin it, it were sad for me if I should draw back."

Milton was far removed from those who would

blindly acquiesce in any belief because it had the sanction of usage. Conscience was his guide; the "inner light," emanating from God, was that which illuminated his reason. Michael, "with regard benign," at the Fall expounds many things to Adam. Not without profit to his immortal soul did woman,—

> "Eve rightly called, Mother of all Mankind,"—
> (P. L., XI., 159.)

tempt him to eat of the forbidden tree; had she not done so, there would not have been for him, and for us, according to the poet, this beginning of academic instruction; so that Adam says—

> "Full of doubt I stand,
> Whether I should repent me now of sin
> By me done and occasioned, or rejoice
> Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring;
> To God more glory, more good-will to men
> From God, and over wrath grace shall abound."
> (P. L., XII., 473–78.)

Had not Eve partaken of the fatal fruit, Michael would not thus have expounded the use of right reason:

> "Sometimes nations will decline so low
> From virtue, which is reason, that no wrong,
> But justice, and some fatal curse annexed,
> Deprives them of their outward liberty,
> Their inward lost."
> (P. L., XII., 97–101.)

After the revolt of Lucifer, when Abdiel was returning alone from the rebellious angels to the throne of God, the words in his honour might have been proclaimed of Milton or of Fox. And when the voice of God greeted this faithful servant—

"Than whom none with more zeal adored
The Deity,"—

(P. L., V., 805–6.)

the praise of "right reason" in that address was only to exalt by different designation that inner light which illumined the path of both of these men:

"A voice
From midst a golden cloud, thus mild was heard:
'Servant of God, well done! Well hast thou fought
The better fight, who single hast maintained
Against revolted multitudes the cause
Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms;
And for the testimony of truth hast borne
Universal reproach, far worse to bear
Than violence; for this was all thy care—
To stand approved in sight of God, though worlds
Judged thee perverse. The easier conquest now
Remains thee, * * * *
Back on thy foes more glorious to return,
* * * * and to subdue
By force who reason for their law refuse,
Right reason for their law.'"

(P. L., VI., 27–42.)

Those are the words of God,—"right reason" was to be man's guide, reason directed by Conscience,—a courageous reliance on the strength of God above and of God within. Later in the same poem Michael reminds Adam of the place occupied by this supreme attribute of God and man:

"Since thy original lapse, true liberty
Is lost, which always with right reason dwells
Twinned."

(P. L., XII., 83–5.)

Paradise Lost ends in a pæan of rejoicing on the part of Adam, who foresees the coming of Messiah:

> "The Seed of Woman: * * *
> * * so God with Man unites."
> (P. L., XII., 379–82.)

> "By that seed
> Is meant thy great Deliverer, who shall bruise
> The Serpent's head."
> (P. L., XII., 148–50.)

As the significance of this mercy which is to come to the race of man,—to Adam's children and to their descendants,—found entrance to his mind, his soul was filled with joy,—

> As had, like grief, been dewed in tears,—

had not the Archangel paused for him to find, instead, expression in words:

> "O prophet of glad tidings, finisher
> Of utmost hope!"
> (P. L., XII., 373–6.)

The remainder of the poem is conceived in an elevation of spirit which is not far removed from that arrived at by the followers of Fox.

Fox believed in man's power to attain moral perfection as a son of God: a belief which Milton shared to the full capacity of a nature at once powerful and intense, a temperament endowed with a giant's strength and a woman's sensibility. The *Tractates on Divorce* were the result of this exact attitude of mind, an inability to compromise in the situation wherein he found himself

involved. He could not temporize in the treatment of a moral problem; if a thing was wrong, he was unable to tolerate any concession in its behalf. He was so stubbornly constituted that he could not at all palliate moral delinquency. Moreover, he believed that it was man's duty to be courageous, to live his life bravely and well; it was his duty to achieve and to maintain happiness. The institution of marriage was of man's creation and for his well-being,—if in any case it resulted in the unhappiness of two individuals, they had a right to expect aid from the same source out of which their union had sprung, and from the same power by which it had been created. He believed with St. Paul: "God hath called us to peace and not to bondage." The *Tractates on Divorce* were essays in moral betterment, a counsel of perfection.

So early as 1631 Milton had solemnly recorded the impulse that dominated his life, and until the end was to regulate every thought and every effort. To that aspiration, and to that dedication, his whole life was consistent. Not Fox himself, folding about his person the mantle of the Hebrew prophets,—their successor, and, so far as his own conviction went, the anointed of the Lord, as they before him had been the anointed of the Lord,—his lips touched with a coal of fire from the altar of the Most High,—not Fox himself was more completely dedicated to the execution of God's will, than this handsome young scholar at the beginning of his career, when he penned the *Sonnet on his Twenty-third Birthday,* ending in that confession of proud humility,—thrilling as Milton's confession of obedience,—the recognition of

the constant presence of God, and of his duty to God and to himself:

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,
That I to manhood am arrived so near;
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure even
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven;
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Task-Master's eye.

Until the day of his death, his life was one sustained and consistent effort to use with unremitting and with persistent care those talents that had been given him,—to use them not for self-aggrandizement, but from a sense of simple duty; never for a moment faltering in his purpose, one guiding motive governing both youth and age, one constant watchword throughout his life:

As ever in my great Task-Master's eye.

This is in exact conformity with the injunction of Michael to Adam,—to Adam departing from Paradise after sinning, but with grace implanted in his heart,—

"Though sorrowing, yet in peace."
(P. L., XI., 117.)

To him Michael, "the great Archangel," "of celestial armies prince," brings a word of courage and of cheer:

"Nor love thy life, nor hate; but what thou liv'st
Live well; how long or short, permit to Heaven."
(P. L., XI., 553–4.)

The two men, Fox and Milton, felt themselves dedicate to the spiritual life, and each pressed forward in confidence toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God; each in a different way thrilling the hearts of those who listened to them. If it were the mantle of the Hebrew prophets that Fox enfolded himself within, Milton, when "soaring in the high region of his fancies, with his garland and singing robes about him," also stood transfigured; and thousands, with his words ringing in their ears, have thought that they were listening to the celestial choir, and to the songs of cherubim and of archangels, "with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies,"—

"And the sound
Symphonious of ten thousand harps, that tuned
Angelic harmonies."
(P. L., VII., 558–60.)

As one reads and ponders these glorious verses, and reflects on the richness of endowment which they reveal, —verses deep in significance, exquisite in modulation, with every charm of versification, and transformed by that poetic fire which reflects the radiance of the first morn and of Paradise,—and as one meditates upon the myriads of men since these were created, and which shall yet be, long after we have departed, to whom they have brought, and shall bring, consolation, and the most complete happiness of which the human mind is capable, —he blesses the wisdom and mercy of the Creator who

vouchsafed for our delectation the man John Milton, and he may well murmur to himself the words of Adam to his celestial visitant,—

> "For, while I sit with thee, I seem in heaven,"
> (P. L., VIII., 210.)

> "Pure
> Intelligence of Heaven, Angel serene."
> (P. L., VIII., 180–1.)

CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE POETIC GENIUS

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I

"THERE can be no better way of making love," a certain sage philosopher has assured his readers, "than to talk about it at the right time and with the proper person." Now love and poetic frenzy are not dissimilar activities of the human mind; in fact, they are expressions of its energy so closely related that one of the wisest and wittiest men that ever lived—even great Plato himself—went so far as to include poet and lover in the same category.

After the pleasure derived from reading poetry, which is the most intimate of all conferences with the object of one's adoration, the very inbreathing and devouring of the spirit, could there be anything more fitted to stimulate this passion than to meditate upon poetic themes? If others also be admitted to the conference, then it becomes a communion of the soul.

Surely no one of our time knew the poets better than did our beloved Lowell. Lucky in many things, it was his commanding good fortune, so far as the beauty of poetry was concerned, to possess an eye of sure dis-

crimination; he had but to see the best in order to love it. When compared with that, everything of slighter charm faded into insignificance. A thousand times he has recorded his reverence for literature, and in one passage particularly has admitted us to share his intimate convictions. "Besides that refining pleasure which is received from Art," he assures us, "the study of it, I am persuaded, makes us acquainted with laws of God and of our own souls whose inspiring thrill cannot leave our lives wholly mean and ordinary. What we truly love we live, and if we truly assimilate the principles of ideal art, we may unconsciously and gradually incorporate into ourselves that truth, order, proportion, simplicity, the power of whose unity shall give us ideal lives."

Jowett had previously expressed almost identically the same idea in different words, in speaking of Plato: "We do not think it possible for any one to dwell on his impassioned admiration and sublime and glowing delineations of the morally fair and beautiful, without being in some degree infected with his ennobling enthusiasm, in accordance with that law by which we become more or less assimilated to the image of whatever is the habitual object of our delighted contemplation."* "The reason of [the soul's] great desire," said Socrates, "to behold the Plain of Truth is that the food which is suited to the highest part of the soul comes out of that meadow." "He who loves the beautiful is called a lover because he partakes of it. For every soul of man has in the way of nature beheld true being; this was the condition of her passing into the form of man. But all souls do not easily recall the things of the other world. * * * Few

* *Edinburgh Review*, April, 1848, Vol. LXXXVII., p. 335.

only retain an adequate remembrance of them; and they, when they behold here any image of that other world, are rapt in amazement; but they are ignorant of what that rapture means, because they do not clearly perceive. * * * There was a time when * * * we were admitted to the sight of apparitions, * * * which we carry about, now that we are imprisoned in the body like an oyster in his shell." *

Milton brooded long and to good purpose over this theme. In *Paradise Lost,* "the wingëd Hierarch,"—"propitious guest,"—in reply to Adam's query, states a belief in "one first matter"; a sort of enlightened pantheism not abhorrent to the scientific thought of our own day:

> "O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
> All things proceed, and up to him return,
> If not depraved from good, created all
> Such to perfection, one first matter all,
> Endued with various forms, various degrees
> Of substance, and, in things that live, of life;
> But more refined, more spiritous and pure,
> As nearer to him placed or nearer tending,
> Each in their several active spheres assigned,
> Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
> Proportioned to each kind."
>
> (P. L., V., 469–79.)

Spirit and body are both an emanation of the energy of the Creator, both are divine in the ascending "scale of Nature";† the power which regulates the growth of the crystal according to its exquisite and immutable harmony is just as fully godlike, in the sense that it is an expression of creative energy, of creative evolution, as

* *Phædrus,* Jowett's translation, 249 d, *et seq.*
† *P. L.,* V., 509.

that which regulates human action when purged of the last taint of self-interest, acting in accordance with social impulse of purest altruism.

At the very beginning of his poetic career Milton gave expression in *Comus* to the same idea which near the close he elaborated more fully and with logical precision in *The Christian Doctrine*. The Elder Brother in *Comus* is meditating upon this transmutation, and the underlying principle in his statement is the same as that in the passage from Jowett already quoted;—it is the converse of the biblical injunction that "evil communications corrupt good manners." The wise physician bids his patient cultivate the society of the young: "Health," he assures us, "is just as catching as the measles." The poet, in the passage referred to, is speaking of the refining influence of uplifted thought, and of the communion with creatures of the spiritual world:

> "Till oft converse with heavenly habitants
> Begin to cast a beam on the outward shape,
> The unpolluted temple of the mind,
> And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
> Till all be made immortal."
>
> (Comus, 459–63.)

And long afterwards he wrote in a mood consistent with this earlier poetic statement:

> "O favourable Spirit, propitious guest,
> Well hast thou taught the way that might direct
> Our knowledge, and the scale of Nature set
> From centre to circumference, whereon,
> In contemplation of created things,
> By steps we may ascend to God."
>
> (P. L., V., 507–12.)

Then and ever he was half Platonist. A man's life, in the final analysis, is that on which his interest is fixed, is that which, hour by hour and day by day, passes through his mind and occupies his waking thought. Trust the Semitic wit for stating this concisely, if in terms of the market: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." A man's treasure *is* his heart, whose systole and diastole are his every-day thoughts, impulses, and emotions, his constant wishes and aspirations; these in the truest sense are his life, all the rest but fleeting and dissolving images.

II

From the heart come great thoughts, and it is in the heart that all great poetry has its origin. The saying of Pascal in regard to Holy Writ is equally true of Poetry: that also is the science not of intelligence but of the heart.

When the poet thinks he feels, and he is so constituted that what with other men would be the ordinary processes of thought,—cool ratiocination,—are with him accompanied by aroused emotion; he cannot think in cold blood. Shelley, with a poet's sympathetic insight, once said of Wordsworth that he awakened "a sort of thought in sense," which is but to approach the same idea from a different angle. With the poet, both thought and emotion, as if held in their appointed orbits by the same compulsive and governing principle of gravity, instantly, and in complete felicity, seek one another, and seek the consummation of harmonious rhythm:

"All heart they live, all head, all eye, all ear,
All intellect, all sense." (P. L., VI., 350–1.)

This endowment of sensibility the poet shares with the musician, whose work is of feeling all compact, only in the case of the poet there is added a more divine element still, one of more celestial origin even than that which music reveals; for here, besides the sensuous and intellectual delight which music gives, are found both words and ideas in addition, which transport the soul as well as cheer and stimulate the mind,—

For eloquence the soul, song charms the sense.
(P. L., II., 556.)

The poet is swayed by strong emotion, is carried along, and is carried beyond himself by the creative impulse and instinct. There must be in his mind an endowment of quickened feeling, and in the medium of expression through which he addresses us the unfailing element of beauty, but with the audience and the reader the true poet, in his inspired mood of creation, is not concerned. The intellectual pleasure of the reader is an indirect object, and is not at all the primary purpose of poetic activity. A poet makes poetry because it is his passion to do so; it is his natural manner of expression, instinctive and inevitable, just as the song of the thrush is the overflowing of exuberant vitality and joyousness. When he sings, he does so from pure delight of song, the act of creation gives him the keenest possible satisfaction. This faculty he exercises because he cannot help himself. When he surrenders himself to the poetic impulse, he is rapt in the delight of doing, and of doing that in which

he is engaged in terms of loveliness and perfection. The contemplation of intellectual beauty not merely thrills, but also satisfies the desire of his soul. Wordsworth has spoken of the poetic impulse as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion"; and elsewhere, giving expression to a similar idea, he has said: "Poetry is emotion remembered in tranquillity," thus directing the attention of the reader with somewhat of emphasis to a quality which perhaps as fully as any other characterizes his own poetry at its best,—the pure and limpid charm of which, untroubled and serene, like a fountain of pure water,—during his moods of inspiration was ever springing up in his mind and pouring itself forth for our refreshment and delectation.

The poet Gray once wrote to Horace Walpole: "As to what you say to me civilly, that I ought to write more, I will be candid and avow to you, that till fourscore and upward, whenever the humour takes me, I will write, because I like it and because I like myself better when I do so." Gray was a striking example among the poets of one who was but rarely moved to express himself in verse. The most industrious of men, he was always occupied with all sorts of studies,—for instance, with those of the naturalist, making himself familiar with the wonders of the created universe. Could there be more wholesome recreation for one possessed of the philosophic and poetic mind?—not dissection, nor merely the delineation of species, but the study of life, its marvel and the mystery of its myriad manifestations.

We have the assurance of Coleridge that Poetry is to be contrasted with Science as having not the bestowal of

knowledge, but of pleasure, for its immediate end. "Beauty," he said, "is the magic circle out of which Poetry must never depart." Whether to contrast Poetry with Science be not to approach the subject from the wrong side, we will not here stop to discuss; at all events, the poet may be placed in opposition to the man of science, as aiming in his own case rather at delight than at knowledge, and Wordsworth has well expressed the poetic temperament in writing his own "Epitaph," and we may treasure this as a miniature of his own mind, at one stage of his career, rendered with sympathetic touch:

> But who is He with modest looks,
> And clad in homely russet brown?
> He murmurs near the running brooks,
> A music sweeter than their own.
>
> He is retired as noontide dew,
> Or fountain in a noon-day grove;
> And you must love him, ere to you
> He will seem worthy of your love.
>
> The outward shows of sky and earth,
> Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
> And impulses of deeper birth
> Have come to him in solitude.
>
> In common things that round us lie
> Some random truths he can impart,—
> The harvest of a quiet eye
> That broods and sleeps on his own heart.
>
> But he is weak; both Man and Boy,
> Hath been an idler in the land;
> Contented if he might enjoy
> The things which others understand.

The admission of the last stanza perhaps jars a little upon our accustomed belief in Wordsworth's equanimity and philosophic poise, but we may love him none the less for the revelation. It is a confession of youth, and the poem in which it occurs was written while he was still a young man, before he was married, and while he was living, with his sister, in Goslar, on the edge of the Hartz Forest in Germany, and was composed as he walked by a certain pond, muffled, he tells us, in a "fur pelisse," and having on his head a "dog's skin bonnet, such as was worn by the peasants." "Here I had no companion but a kingfisher, a beautiful creature that used to glance by me. I consequently became much attached to it."* The reader cannot but share his friendship for this pleasant bird, one of the most lovely of Europe, which is seen darting by the river's edge like a morsel of animated opal!

In all really great works of science,—in Newton, or Bacon, or Darwin,—the imagination is stimulated and tempted to endless applications and extensions of the general laws of the universe, and it is an accepted axiom of science, that no really great work can be accomplished within its realm unless the scientific imagination be ever eager and alert. Mere accumulation of facts, though they be piled as high as the moon, is worthless, almost in proportion to its mass, unless the scientific imagination vivify those facts, convert them by the magic of its power into something organic, the nerves and sinews of a consistent plan. In the creation of any commanding work of science,—in the *Origin of Species* or *The Descent of Man,* for instance,—the mind has to run ahead

* Wordsworth, *A Poet's Epitaph,* Knight's Ed., II., 66.

of proof and to anticipate a possible conclusion, in the light of which facts may be subordinated and coördinated in their appointed and inevitable sequence. The mind is forced to form a working hypothesis, and, to accomplish this, a delicate and powerful exercise of the scientific imagination is required. This is really an act of creation, and almost the first word to be said of Poetry is that, as the name signifies, it is an act of creation; the poet shares this with God, that he is creator.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; herein lies the power of the poet, that whatever issues from his mouth in his mood of inspiration is creative. Even if a song has long been sung, if Burns sing it anew he creates it, the word springing from his lips becomes alive. "Let there be light," saith God, and instantly light filled the valleys and spread abroad over the deep. Milton addresses light as the "coeternal beam"; from all eternity it has existed in the thought of the Almighty as the sculptor's statue lives hidden in the block of marble, but it demands the creative energy of the artist to release it in its perfection.

Diotima, the wise woman of Mantineia, when she was instructing Socrates as to the nature of Love, spoke this illuminative word on a kindred theme: "There is Poetry, which, as you know, is complex and manifold. And all creation or passage of non-being into being is poetry or making, and the processes of all art are creative; the masters of all arts are poets." *

* Socrates, in *The Banquet.*

III

One of the first things that occur to the student who is entering upon an investigation into the nature of the poet's endowment is the distinction between the poetic genius, which is creative, and the poetic art, which is concerned with the technique of form; or, as Wordsworth has admirably contrasted them, the "vision and the faculty divine," on the one hand; and on the other, the "accomplishment of verse." Only a few men and women of every generation, or of every century, are endowed with this accomplishment of adequate and complete expression in verse, but nearly everybody, once or twice or a few times in his life, has caught, with greater or less degree of success, the trick of "writing poetry." The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table even went so far as to say that unless a man had composed verses before he was twenty years of age, he would never amount to anything at all; in the opinion of this wise physician of the body and the mind, to be poetical to this degree was only a healthful sign of adolescence. Swayed by this impulse and facility of expression, which also is creative,—and is entitled to a sort of minor reverence,—perhaps when his emotions are under the exaltation of awakening love, the youth would fain convince others and himself that he is possessed as well of that higher and rarer endowment of poetic vision.

What that genius is, we may perhaps best comprehend if we consult the poets themselves upon the theme. "The poets themselves," Dryden has assured us, "are the most proper, though not the only critics of poetry."* It be-

* Preface to *All for Love.*

hooves us, however, to accept their aid with certain mental reservations, keeping in mind Plato's caution that the poets are the poorest judges of their own productions. The truth must perforce lie somewhere between these two extremes, which, although apparently opposed, are still capable of reconciliation. Whether we accept the poets' own estimate or not, we shall certainly find their opinions stimulating in this investigation, since they have long brooded over these problems, to them of primary and vital importance.

What is the difference between poetry of the first order and every other kind? There is something about the best that is bewitching, and that makes us regard the rest of it with indifference, nay, almost as an impertinence when compared with that, in a way not dissimilar to that in which one under the domination of love remains obtuse and immune to all other attractions except to such as emanate from the object of his devotion. If one really feels the best poetry, and responds to its power, it simply effaces the second best, and all other; and the purpose of poetic cultivation is to make the reader quick to recognize that which has real excellence, and genuinely to prefer it to every other sort.

The quality which makes poetry perfect and thrilling, —which, for example, distinguishes the best of that of Burns and of Wordsworth from all the rest of it,—may not at first be perceived. Each person may enjoy it according to his capacity; only he can feel its full excellence whose powers of joy are as strong as the poet's own. Plato has an illuminative word on this when he speaks of "The eye seeing in all things what it brought with it

the faculty of seeing." "Never," said Plotinus, "could the eye have beheld the sun had not its own essence been preconfigured to light, neither can a soul not beautiful attain to an intuition of beauty."

Why should beauty, harmony, proportion, arouse our emotional sensibilities? Is it because the human soul craves perfection,—perfection in the domain of Will, which is the Good; perfection in the domain of Knowledge, which is the True; perfection in the domain of Sensation and Perception, which is the Beautiful? Is it because in the contemplation of beauty desire is awakened? "Love is only birth in beauty," said Plato, "whether of body or soul." * The longing of the devotee is not for possession but for contemplation. Desire is raised above the concrete, the personal and selfish, to the abstract, the impersonal, the unselfish and immortal. I am lost in contemplation of perfection, of the ideal, of the universal; while the ecstasy of artistic or æsthetic transport remains, I am a part of the unlimited, of the unconditioned, of the Infinite. The few thus equipped are those who in the service of their fellows have broken the bonds which once bound them solely to their own affairs and to their own well-being,—who have escaped from the prison of self, and have come to breathe that ampler ether and diviner air of the impersonal, the unlimited, the Infinite. Studying a great poet, such as this, "my guide, my lord, my master," the reader who is strengthened with his energy, who is inspired by the gladness of his heart, and who partakes of his joy and mirth,—who is lifted on the wings of his ecstasy,—dares

* *The Banquet*, I., 498.

breathe words that are at once an adoration and a prayer: "I, even I, am a living soul!"

The lover of beauty craves perfection, not with the same intensity of desire, it may be, as the lover of moral perfection, but still the longings are not dissimilar, and, unknown to himself, he responds in a different way to the Christian's aspiration, although it be incapable of complete realization: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

We may rest assured that Aristotle, if ever man possessed this endowment, had both a sound head and the capacity for sane judgment; in the *Poetics* he has distinctly declared that Poetry is a more philosophic and serious matter than History itself. We need the poet's penetration to read History aright, and to judge of the personages who appear upon its stage. Under a mean exterior may be concealed a noble soul,—the figure of a god within the mask of Silenus, is the simile which Alcibiades uses in describing Socrates. The poet, the one who sees life aright and discerns its real import, apprehending in the sureness of his poetic vision that which is common to all men, reveals to us our own hidden powers, our own capabilities, which without his aid might have remained hidden and undreamt of by us except perhaps in one of the supreme moments of life. These times of clear-sightedness without doubt come to every person in seasons of mental exaltation,—it may be of great sorrow as well as of rejoicing,—but since they are with us so rarely, and then in periods of mental stress and agitation, they may serve rather to distort the perspective of life than to assist at a sane comprehension of its meaning. The poets, said Wordsworth, have given

us "nobler loves and nobler cares." By the poet's imaginative gift, we are enabled to live the lives of other men, to see with their eyes, think with their minds, to feel almost with their senses and with their powers of feeling.

If the poet be merely the artist, the creator of the beautiful, a "wingëd and holy thing" as he is characterized in Plato's *Republic,* let us in true catholicity of spirit, take what he can give,—not despising him for what he lacks, for what he is powerless to impart,—accepting thankfully the creation of beauty with the same joy that we should the freshness and delight of a morning in May, or as we welcome the rapture of the skylark's song:

> Better than all measures
> Of delightful sound,
> Better than all treasures
> That in books are found,
> Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground.

That is one poetic creed.

There could be no greater error than to imagine any necessary conflict between strong feeling and sound reason,—feeling with joy as well as with sorrow; man's allotted task on earth being one of appreciation, of sympathy, and of joy,—man's "task of happiness," as a poet has finely called it. One remembers that, in the *Divine Comedy,* Dante and his guide found in the seventh circle of Hell, driven in torment through the Wood of the Suicides, in eternal agony, worried by hell-hounds, among such as had robbed themselves of their bodies and of their possessions, those who had, while upon earth, and in the "sweet light of the sun," "wept there where they should be joyous."

> Man can do violence
> To himself and his own blessings; and for this
> He * * * must aye deplore
> With unavailing penitence his crime;
> Whoe'er deprives himself of life and light,
> In reckless lavishment his talent wastes,
> And sorrows there where he should dwell in joy.*

The same sentiment is found in the *Faerie Queene:*

> For he whose daies in wilful woe are worne,
> The grace of his Creator doth dispise.†

And even great Milton, steeped in the spirit of that moral idealism, that sad and compulsive sincerity which swept England like a tornado at the time of the Christian renaissance, of the new awakening of conscience, even he "disapproves that care,"—

> That with superfluous burden loads the day,
> And, when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.‡

The very first words of Adam, newly awakening in the "happy garden," have, as we should expect, the note of youth and exultation:

> " 'Thou Sun,' said I, 'fair light,
> And thou enlightened Earth, so fresh and gay.' "
> (P. L., VIII., 273–4.)

All the poets are united in this, the last of them as well as the first:

> Laugh and drink from the deep blue cup of the sky,
> Join the jubilant song of the great stars sweeping by,

* Cary's translation, *Inferno,* XI., 26–32.
† IV., viii., 15. ‡ Sonnet XXI.

Laugh, and battle, and work, and drink of the wine outpoured
In the dear green Earth, the sign of the joy of the Lord.*

Poetry must be based upon knowledge of nature and of man, but the poet's knowledge and his science are concealed, they are of the nature of a reserve force, serving to make effective his poetic genius, but not obtrusive or apparent. They are like the seven out of the eight parts of an iceberg which are beneath the surface of the water, and which must be there, if the iceberg be not stranded, a mere dead and inert mass with not even capacity to do harm. "Poetry is the impassioned expression which is the countenance of all science."

Man's delight in poetry, said Aristotle, arises from the fact that he is an imitative being. "God createth," saith the old adage, "Man imitateth, Virtue flourisheth,† Death finisheth." Voltaire, with his accustomed wit, followed this idea to its legitimate conclusion, when he said that man had created God in his own image.

The poet is both imitator and creator. Lamb has a word to say on this: "Therein the great and little wits are differenced; that if the latter wander ever so little from nature or actual existence, they lose themselves and their readers. Their phantoms are lawless; their

* Masefield, *Ballads and Poems; Laugh and be Merry.*

Even the psychologist must "keep up with the procession" and become poetical in spirit: "The highest point reached by laughter, undoubtedly, is intimately related with the highest intellectual, æsthetic, and moral development. * * * Joy, from which all laughter comes, springs from subconsciousness. * * * Laughter is the light of the spirit. Mirth, like Venus, may be born of the foam of life, but under the foam there are the depths of the ocean of being, over which smiles and laughter come up playfully. * * * The highest development of ridicule, true humour, brings one in touch with the Infinite. True humour in its highest stages sees the infinite depth of the soul in the failures, faults, defects, and imperfections of human nature." Boris Sidis, Ph.D., *Why Do We Laugh?*

† That is, causes to flourish.

visions nightmares. They do not create, which implies shaping and consistency. Their imaginations are not active,—for to be active is to call something into act and form,—but are passive, as men in sick dreams." *

IV

THREE things of vital importance Coleridge enumerates as essential to the equipment of the poet,—Sensibility, Imagination, Power of Association. The following passage from Emerson is nearly identical in significance with the statement of Coleridge, and it is what we might expect that, meditating upon the same theme, minds so alike in the fullness of their endowment should give expression to the thought in nearly identical words. Referring to Plutarch, Emerson says: "He had many qualities of the poet, in the power of his imagination, the speed of his mental associations, and his sharp, objective eyes." Where Coleridge uses the word "sensibility," Emerson, with a dash of Socratic humour quite characteristic of his New England associations, makes mention of his "sharp, objective eyes." It goes without saying that his faculties are quickly responsive to impressions of every sort, otherwise he would not be a poet; it is his *métier* to be impressionable. Dante, knowing well what it means quickly to respond both to sorrow and to joy, quotes the words of Aristotle which express his own feeling in the matter: "The more a thing is perfect, the more it feels pleasure and likewise pain."

This very delicacy of organization and of men-

* Lamb, *Sanity of True Genius.*

tal equipment, and the power of strong feeling which accompanies it, are the things which as much as anything else differentiate the poet from other men. Even the great Milton, whom many of our degenerate day (in their blindness perceiving not his clearness of sight) have come to regard as a sort of intellectual giant, a man of unmeasured power, they may be willing to concede, but in temperament like a granite boulder, of perfect solidity and poise,—one who could elaborate an epic with the same sureness with which a well-trained engineer would draw his plans for a suspension bridge across a flood, or for a "giant causey" from Earth to Hell,—this same impassive Milton wrote from Italy to Charles Diodati, that his soul was "tremulous with emotion" by reason of the beauty which he beheld. Unless he had possessed this quick and sensitive power of apprehension, his mind would never have garnered the innumerable impressions from the external world which afterwards in solitary blindness he poured forth in terms of beauty and of sonorous majesty in the inspired cantos of *Paradise Lost.*

Milton's famous characterization of the essentials of poetry has been misunderstood well-nigh from his own day to our own. What he really said was not that poetry should be "simple, sensuous, passionate,"—thus affording a canon of excellence, and enunciating a sort of criterion,—but that, as contrasted with logic, poetry is more simple, sensuous, and passionate; which is a very different thing altogether. Much more than these three attributes is necessary to constitute poetry as Milton conceived it; and these traits, although they differentiate poetry from logic, do not attain at all to the element of

the sublime within whose vast infinite revolves the mighty orbit of Milton's own poetic genius.

The phrase to which reference is made occurs parenthetically in a letter to Master Samuel Hartlib, whose name, well known though it was to scholars of his own day, comes down to posterity like the proverbial fly in amber, since he was the means of bringing to us this concise and pregnant criticism. What we are chiefly interested with now, however, in this letter, is the importance which Milton attaches to Poetry when considered relatively to other branches of study in the poet's scheme of intellectual training,—an arduous course under which ordinary youths would hopelessly founder, and to which only the precocity of a Sidis or the colossal strength of a Milton could conform. This scheme of education, even if not practicable for ordinary men, is of value as revealing the power of the man and his endurance and capacity for assimilation. The achievement which he demanded of the pupil seemed to him the most natural thing in the world. Since in his spare hours it had been a task of slight difficulty for the poet himself to acquire the Hebrew tongue and the "Chaldee and Syrian dialects," why then should it be impossible for other lads? It is to be borne in mind, when one contemplates the Herculean task which he would set before his pupils, that he has in mind not the teacher of average faculties but always one of exceptional endowment, and to his mind the difficulty of accomplishment was primarily that of the instructor and not of the pupil: "Thus, Mr. Hartlib, you have a general view in writing * * * concerning the best and noblest way of education. * * * Only I believe that this is not a bow for every man to

shoot with that counts himself as a teacher, but will require sinews almost equal to those which Homer gave Ulysses."*

Milton assigns to poetry the place of completing and perfecting an otherwise one-sided and dwarfed education. Only after poetic culture can the most highly endowed minds be said to be "liberally educated" or "fraught with an universal insight into things," so that, "whether they be to speak in parliament or council, honour and attention would be waiting on their lips."

"And now, lastly," he says, "will be the time to read with them those organic arts which enable men to discourse and write perspicuously, elegantly, and according to the fitted style of lofty, mean, or lowly. Logic, therefore, so much as is useful, is to be referred to this due place, with all her well-couched heads and topics, until it be time to open her contracted palm into a graceful and ornate rhetoric. To which poetry would be made subsequent, or, indeed, rather precedent, as being less subtile and fine, but more simple, sensuous, and passionate; I mean not here the prosody of a verse, which they could not but have hit on before among the rudiments of grammar, but that sublime art which in Aristotle's *Poetics,* in Horace, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric, *what decorum is, which is the grand masterpiece to observe.*"

Let us not, in admiration of the three words to which

* Though the scheme of education as set forth by Milton required the sinews of Ulysses, yet did he himself make trial of it with the youth entrusted to his care, as we learn from the statement of his nephew, Edward Philips. That formidable list of Latin and Greek authors seems less incapable of accomplishment when one learns the method of procedure in the case of Sidis and of others trained under similar methods.

reference has so often been made,—so concise and full of significance,—overlook that other quality which he states to be "the grand masterpiece to observe," whether in epic, dramatic, or lyric poetry, and which Milton the most fully of all the moderns,—perhaps with Landor next in order as worthy successor of the ancients,—mastered and expressed,—the attribute of *decorum*. The mention of Horace's name in the passage just quoted comes in appropriately here; that verse of his is familiar, the limpid utterance of a nature perfectly sweet and human,—

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

We have heard it a thousand times without stopping to think what is involved in the word *decorum*. Whether in the realm of poetry or of life, none knew better than Milton the true significance of this word; both his verse and character stand as supreme monuments to this quality of the poet and the man.

To have and to express decorum is not merely to be decorous; one might almost say that to be decorous is to be unpoetic, so hatefully have our Puritan ancestors bedevilled and done their best to eliminate from human nature the perfectly natural craving for beauty and for joy. The words "decorum" and "decorate" are derived from the same root; decorum is that quality which the sonatas of Beethoven have, and which perhaps no other music quite so fully reveals; they are like untroubled sleep, calm and serene, through whose portals one enters a world of pleasant dreams, bringing refreshment to the spirit, like Wisdom in that charming passage from *Proverbs:* "[Their] ways are ways of pleasantness, and

all [their] paths are peace." When we say that *Paradise Lost* possesses the quality of decorum, "which is the grand masterpiece to observe," we mean that it is nobly decorated with everything which learning, scholarship, poetic power, and sensibility could bring. It is the record of an eye and ear ever alert and eager to seize the myriad forms of beauty which others behold and do not apprehend, and it has all those traits of excellence which a deep-brained intellect and sound character could contribute under the majestic rule of Law.

> Every verse, arrayed in majesty,
> Bold and sublime,

are the words used by Addison in describing *Paradise Lost*.

Milton's decorum is so generous and so rich, has a quality so lavish and so warm, as well as so graceful and so stately, that it wins our regard almost as humour does in another man. Lamb, who was the most humourous and most humane of men, and who loved the quality of humour as much as anybody that ever lived, was yet unswerving in his allegiance to his best beloved of all the poets, the one who has almost the least of them all any trait of humour whatever. He felt in its completeness the spell of Milton's power, and of the marvellous becomingness of every utterance of his muse. Apart from this poet's insight and ardour, Lamb was won by the graciousness and courtesy and distinction of his deportment, as he would have been by the friendly glance of the eye in another, by the touch of his hand, or an unpretentious, kindly word.

Lamb's contribution to the study of poetry is of no

slight value, and he has a word to say about the sanity of true genius, which is very closely related to the faculty of humour, in itself almost a touchstone for mental health. "It is impossible," he tells us, "for the mind to conceive of a mad Shakespeare. The greatness of wit, by which the poetic talent is here chiefly to be understood, manifests itself in the admirable balance of all the faculties. Madness is the disproportionate straining or excess of any one of them. 'So strong a wit,' says Cowley, speaking of a poetical friend,

> " 'Did Nature to him frame,
> As all things but his judgment overcame;
> His judgment like the heavenly moon did show,
> Tempering that mighty sea below.' " *

The powers of ordinary men, heightened, do not become poetic, but the poetic endowment, even when its manifestations are but slight, is of its own peculiar sort. It is not a difference of quantity but of quality that one finds here, and it is far-reaching and elemental; the two may not be compared any more than the heart of oak and the flame into which it is transformed.

Not only must the poet have the perceiving eye, and behold that which ordinary men overlook,—like Shelley, from the bridge at Florence watching the sun weave its pattern of light on the varying surface of the Arno,—but since the pleasure of the reader is the primary object of poetry, he must have an ear sensitive to delicate sound as well, and must be able to derive and convey,—again to use Coleridge's words, "delight in richness and sweetness of sound." † When Milton was engaged in

* Lamb, *The Sanity of True Genius.*
† *Lectures on Shakespeare*, 494.

the composition of *Paradise Lost* he spent hours daily at the organ, refreshing his mind and nourishing his soul on its music; and the splendour of that sound is heard reverberating through the cantos of the poem in the same way that it lingers in the aisles and beneath the vaulted roof of a cathedral, caught up in echoing cadence,—ever thrilling and satisfying that inward ear of the reader, which, as well as the "inward eye," is also the "bliss of solitude."

V

THE theme of melody has an esoteric significance; there must be melody to the ear and to the mind as well. The poet must by penetrative insight detect, and have the power to transmit to others, those inner harmonies of the universe,—of the world of mind as well as of matter,—which only the *illuminati* recognize and apprehend.

The Greeks were very sensitive to that inherent and vital quality of a poem which penetrates and permeates every part of it, that quality which contributes to the even balance of all the parts and to the certain poise of the whole. This they sometimes commended as the "temper" of a poem, just as a swordsman might praise the fine resilience of Damascus steel; a quality which so rules the matter wherein it resides that it cannot err from excellence, but, whether in motion or repose, maintains an ever just proportion, a felicitous agreement like that of music.

The fine equipment of the ear and of the eye, and of those penetrative faculties of the mind which correspond

to them and interpret their meaning, are traits which as much as anything else set the poet apart from ordinary men; possessing these, he moves in a higher sphere. The prayer of the true poet has been well expressed by Milton:

> So much the rather thou, celestial Light,
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.*

As well as a musical instinct the poet must have a correct logical sense to insure the proper development of his theme. A lyric or an essay, as well as an epic or a tragedy, has a plot. If his instinct be discriminating, the poet constructs an organic work of art. Matthew Arnold has dwelt upon the perfection of "architectonics" in *Paradise Lost,* in conformity with which the poet has constructed a mighty epic with the same felicity of execution, holding its organic parts in true relation, that is shown by the builder of a great cathedral, where each portion is regulated to conform with the majesty of the whole, and where every detail of decoration is so subordinated to the effectiveness of the completed building, that the spectator, while he takes delight in the elaboration of each separate passage, yet never for a moment forgets the ultimate purpose of it all,—the logical end of its existence,—which is the glory of God and the magnificence of his worship.

The musician, too, would maintain that music is the most logical of all things, in perfect harmony conforming to law. The poet gives expression to this idea when

* *Paradise Lost,* III., 51–5.

he bids us listen to the music of the spheres, which to his attent and reverent ear is but the expression, in imposing rhythm, of serene order, the harmonic observance of law underlying and penetrating all matter and all mind.

Since logic is the driest thing in the world, it seems strange to demand an endowment of this for the poet; but, whatever happens, he must firmly grasp the true relation of things, one to another. This is a mental act involving an exercise of judgment, the power of justly valuing the relative importance of events and their necessary sequence, which, united, form the Action of a poem, a quality so highly prized by Aristotle in the *Poetics* that he ranks it in epic and tragic poetry as of primary importance. The logical mind is a mechanical necessity; it is a part of the necessary technical equipment, as vital to the whole structure as the steel framework within its walls making possible a modern cliff-dwelling of the city.

The poet must have logical power, but the last thing that should happen to him should be to find himself beneath the domination alone of cold reason. There is a sort of madness, an unreasoning afflatus which Milton thought to be an emanation of the divine spirit, to which the creator of a poem willingly and with joy surrenders himself:

> *Camillo:* Be advised.
> *Florizel:* I am, and by my fancy;* if my reason
> Will thereto be obedient, I have reason;
> If not, my senses, better pleased with madness,
> Do bid it welcome.†

* Here not "creative fancy" but merely "preference."
† *Winter's Tale,* IV., iii., 488–92.

An Elizabethan poet* has said of Marlowe—

> For that fine madness still he did retain
> That rightly should possess a poet's brain.

And Milton speaks of himself as—

> Smit with the love of sacred song,
> (P. L., III., 29.)

just as one might be smitten with unreasoning madness, or with love, which is much the same kind of malady, terribly interesting to the victim while it lasts, but a sort of divine distress, out of which may spring the most ethereal and the most enduring of human affections.

VI

In striking contrast with the accurate and logical sense, which, though vital, is but a means to an end, is the sense of humour, and the humourous faculty, one of the divinest qualities of the human mind. Where that is found in abundance, like threads of gold in quartz, or nuggets in the sand, there is no need to advertise the preciousness of the metal; people will flock to the diggings. What a mine of mirth and happiness have Chaucer and Cervantes and Molière been to the elect among whole generations of mankind! That this gladness of the heart need not necessarily impair the greatness of the philosophic mind, one has but to think of Emerson, or of Shakespeare, or of Plato, to feel assured.

With a strong sense of humour no one can long take himself too seriously; it is a sort of inspired and glorified

* Drayton.

tact, illuminating the mind from within,—a radiance as little related to dull realities as that of the glow-worm or the fire-fly,—an expression also, like their coruscations, of health and vital energy. That Wordsworth had not a prevailing sense of humour is well known, else would he not have written verses which sometimes even lay him open to ridicule, the inevitable result of which has been that many well-meaning persons are so antagonized that it is impossible for them to read him with patience,—as Byron and William Morris could not,—and consequently these people are deprived of one of the most full and satisfying delights of literature. His was the great voice of his time, speaking in a sad sincerity, bringing Heaven very near indeed to those who have sympathy with his meditations and poetic ideals. But as for humour, he had next to none at all of that. One of the Westmoreland peasants who, boy and man, had known the poet well, said of him, "You could tell fra the man's faace his po'try would niver have no laugh in it."* Another peasant, who had been a servant at Rydal Mount, said: "I don't remember he ever laughed in his life; he 'd smile, times or two." Let us not forget, in justice to him, that though his "po'try" had no laugh in it, yet it has what is also precious in its way, even better than the downright laugh of another man, a "smile times or two,"—a grave smile of compelling charm.

Mrs. Wordsworth would seem to have had a sense of humour, or at least something closely akin to that, an endowment of originality so prompt and effective as to make us better understand the remark made by a peas-

* Those who did not like him, and who perhaps had in mind certain arid stretches of the *Excursion,* said that his face was long and dreary-looking and resembled that of a horse. They did not know.

ant of the neighbourhood after the poet's death, that "he supposed the ladies would continue to carry on the business." But the incident best illustrating her humourous originality was told by the same old servant at Rydal Mount:

"You said it was hard to get him to his meals; what did you mean?" I asked.

"Well, well, it was study as was his delight; he was aw for study, and Mrs. Wordsworth would say, 'Ring the bell,' but he would n't stir, bless ye.

" 'Goa and see what he 's doing,' she 'd say, and we goa up to study door and hear him a-mumbling and bumming through it.

" 'Dinner 's ready, sir,' I 'd ca' out, but he 'd goa mumbling on like a deaf man, ya see.

"And sometimes Mrs. Wordsworth 'u'd say, 'Goa and break a bottle or let a dish fall just outside door in passage.' Eh! dear, that mostly 'u'd bring him out, w'u'd that. It was only that as w'u'd, however. For ye kna he was a very careful mon, and he could n't do with breaking the china." *

Wordsworth had not humour, but when he presented such a scene as this, in the *Leech Gatherer,* and clothed it in sunshine and exuberance of vitality,—a sort of pervading smile of cheerfulness,—we forget all that he lacked, and, in simple thankfulness, rejoice with him, and call his name blessed. He has seized the very freshness of the morning, and put a spirit of youth in everything:

* Mrs. Wordsworth's solicitude and her means of calling her hungry philosopher to his meals makes one by contrast think of the manner in which Montaigne's father used to awaken him, when a lad, with music, that he might enter upon the day with spirits serene and unperturbed. In either case there was a nice adjustment of means to end.

All things that love the sun are out of doors;
The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;
The grass is bright with rain-drops;—on the moors
The hare is running races in her mirth;
And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist, that, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

Perhaps Chaucer, of all that have spoken in our tongue, had the fullest endowment of this gift. As one reads him the effect is not necessarily that laughter is provoked, but a sort of gladness pervades the spirits, an increasing and cumulative cheerfulness like sunlight after storm; he feels just as a cat must when she purrs; a genial glow pervades his spirits and warms the cockles of his heart; an emanation of cordial vapours surrounds him like the fragrance of spring, and puts a spirit of youth in everything, such magic is there in content. If any trait of poetry shows its divine origin, it is this, full of tenderness and akin to mercy.

Humour, as every one knows, signifies moisture, and the most subtle and exquisitely humourous things in the world often have a strain of sadness about them, as in Hawthorne, at his best, in *The Twice Told Tales* and *The Wonder-Book*. Unless a man have deep feeling,—capacity for tears as well as for laughter,—beware the edge of his wit. He may have what is called a "trenchant humour," which is just about as sensible as to speak of a "slashing caress," but he has never drunk at all from the fountain sources of most precious human experience. The subtlety of such humour as Hawthorne's would be lost upon him like the benediction of

the morning's dew gently falling from heaven on the cherished offspring of the cow. "Her smile," said Sydney Smith, speaking not of the cow but of a charming woman—"her smile was so sweet that it would make a gooseberry bush burst into flower."

Humour and courtesy are akin; humour may be so fine and so humane as to be the very efflorescence and finer breath of courtesy;—on the other hand, courtesy may be so genuine as to have a touch of humour about it, of that sublimated tact which is an element of fine humour; and as courtesy makes one happy, so may one laugh from content, with never a joke in sight. The joyous temperament and the intense temperament were the two characteristics of the poet that came first to the mind of Keats when he addressed the mighty dead:

> Bards of passion and of mirth.

Unless a man can laugh with a full heart, it is safe to question the sincerity of his tears, or of his pathetic lucubrations over the miseries of mankind.

> Bards of passion and of mirth,
> Ye have left your souls on earth!
> Ye have souls in heaven too,
> Double-liv'd in regions new.
> Where the nightingale doth sing
> Not a senseless, trancéd thing,
> But divine melodious truth;
> Philosophic numbers smooth;
> Tales and golden histories
> Of heaven and its mysteries.

Humour and courtesy are both closely related to true decorum, and while, for instance, there is not a gleam

of humour in *Paradise Lost,* there is a quality of grace and decoration in that poem so satisfying in a similar way that it appeals to more than a single sense of appreciation and delight,—like a glass of good old wine, carrying a message of cheer to the heart, deeply grateful, at once, to the sense of smell, to the palate, and to the eye.

The sublimation and finest flower of humour is in Plato; the humour of Socrates in the *Dialogues* is most delicate and soothing and caressing; it hardly resembles in the slightest degree the wit of Swift or Carlyle, for instance, but is of that order of excellence found only in Molière, and Cervantes, and Lamb, and Hawthorne, and a few others. So delicate is it that one accustomed to the crude intellectual excitement of the professed humourist fails to detect it as having any existence whatever. The perfect humour and courtesy of the Socratic dialogues, suave and humane, varying only in form of manifestation, are the pervading sunshine which gives warmth and comfortable human quality to the whole.

VII

Strong feeling is the one thing without which there cannot be poetry; it must be feeling of a fine order, translated out of the petty and individual into the large and universal. If the poet's passion be sufficiently deep, the "chord of self," it may be "in trembling," passes "out of sight." To teach people "to see, to think, and to feel," said Wordsworth, is the end of poetry; and elsewhere, with a fine glancing of poetic insight, he has given us a true poetic criticism: "Poetry is the impassioned expression which is the countenance of all science."

As contrasted with logic, poetry is "less subtile and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate." Simple it must be if it is good, for all the best things in life are simple,—poetry, manners, character. Poetry cannot be involved and intricate without diverting the mind from the object which it is the poet's purpose to effect, Carlyle with all his epic force, and Browning with his tremendous vitality, notwithstanding.

The poet is one whose power of receiving acute impressions, increase of years and the deadening paralysis of conventional life have not dulled; in human life the period of first development is often that of fullest equipment. There is in Coleridge a luminous passage of unusual interest, since in it he hints at the secret which we would grasp; and in him was the rare endowment and combination of the metaphysical and thoroughly logical mind, in union with the sensibility of one whose medium of thought at times is rapt above the terms of ordinary speech, and becomes a harmony of the soul, at once the medium of strong intelligence and of musical expression. "The poet," he tells us, "is one who carries the simplicity of childhood into the powers of manhood; who, with a soul unsubdued by habit, unshackled by custom, contemplates all things with the freshness and wonder of a child; and, connecting with it the inquisitive powers of riper years, adds, as far as he can find knowledge, admiration; and, where knowledge no longer permits admiration, gladly sinks back again into the childlike feeling of devout wonder." *

The parable of the wind, the earthquake, and the fire is true of the poet's spell; for him to be heard when he is inspired, the last thing that is necessary is to shout

* *Lectures on Milton and Shakespeare*, 104–5.

aloud. "And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."

The poet is intense, or he is no poet. "God be praised! I live!" said Heine, in a passage which is certainly possessed of frankness, if it have no other virtue: "The red blood courses in my veins, the earth throbs beneath my feet, like a lover I embrace trees and statues and they live in my embrace. Each woman is a world presented to me, I revel in the harmonies of her countenance; with a single glance of my eye I can enjoy more than other men with their whole bodies in a whole lifetime." "A poet in prose or verse," said Emerson, "must have a sensuous eye, but an intellectual co-perception."

A poem reproduces in the reader, so far as his capacity permits, the poet's keenness of impression; it must be "immediate in its impulse on the senses," is the admirable way in which Coleridge gives expression to the idea.* The whole science of Æsthetics, as the etymology of the word signifies, is in the beginning based upon accurate sensation; this power of complete apprehension by the senses the poet has in generous endowment.

VIII

An element of great poetry, and one that almost as surely as any other distinguishes it from all but the best, is the quality of ease and simplicity. These may be regarded

** Lectures on Milton and Shakespeare, 57.*

almost as synonymous, since in poetry, as in manners, the best way to be at ease is to be simple and unaffected. Ease implies sincerity, and that has its fountain source in genuineness, a supreme quality of the heart, of which sincerity is the expression. "It is a man's sincerity and depth of vision that makes him a poet," Carlyle has assured us.

The consideration of the qualities of impersonality, genuineness, ease, and simplicity, inevitably leads the student to the consideration of the precious quality of repose, closely wedded to that which Milton lauded as the "grand masterpiece to observe." Decorum, such as Milton would bid us value aright, implies repose; for there cannot be dignity, and true elegance of adornment, without deep and vital repose as a means to this end; it is the simplicity of pure and solid gold. In Milton we could find a thousand illustrations of what repose signifies, of what decorum. Its significance is not to have a plentiful lack of animation. Grace and lightness in dancing do not imply a lack of power, but its presence and exercise; and in equal degree, genuine artistic repose, such as is found in the Greek Tragedy and in Milton, of course implies vigour and energy and alertness. A work of so-called art may be as void of any vital trait as a withered tree stripped of its bark, long buffeted by wind and storm, a monument of inertness and of death, and still not possess a single trait of repose. Aristotle has made mention of the "activity of motionlessness," and in a converse way it is its elemental repose that ennobles the surging sea.

Now in the considering of the quality of sincerity very grave issues are involved, even to the pass that

there have been among those of the most generous and highly endowed minds who have felt a distrust of the histrionic talent altogether, of the endowment of the actor who portrays the emotions of other men, simulating to feel that which he does not really feel, or artificially creating in his mind a mood of feeling, so that for the time being the emotion which he is paid to represent he does feel, it may be to the point of laughter or to the shedding of tears. The puritan temperament, emphasizing genuineness and sincerity before everything else, found itself so little in accord with this habit of mind, that in revulsion of feeling it pronounced such facility to be little better than the complaisant art of the courtesan.

The reply to this indictment of course would be that the great actor does not allow his emotions to be stirred. He remains perfectly self-possessed while upon the stage, and thereby is enabled in the most effective manner possible to make use of all the resources of his art to arouse the emotions of the spectator. That which he gives us is the product of trained intelligence, and of the imagination schooled to present in equal perfection both the workings of the intelligence of other persons and of their emotions, and of the varying emotions and motives of conduct of all classes of men, under every conceivable combination of circumstances. This it is that distinguishes the really great actor from the one not so great, —that he does not permit himself to be swayed by his feelings from the accurate representation of nature, presented to him by the creative fancy. The actor's transcript of nature is just as fully an act of artistic creation,—his advocate would maintain,—as that of the

painter, the poet, the novelist, the orator, the musician, or of the dramatist himself.*

IX

The poet is swayed not alone by the breath of creative frenzy,† but is in full possession of his judgment and of his reason. He is both creator and in the most vital sense philosopher. "No man was ever yet a great poet," says Coleridge, "without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language." And Shelley, who read and reverenced the poets in a degree commensurate with his own intense nature, has said in *The Defence of Poetry,* in words long to be remembered for their veracity and for their conciseness: "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds."

I can approve
* * * the state of Poesy
Blessed, eternal, and most true divine.

says one of the old dramatists ‡,—

View her in her glorious ornaments,
Attiréd in the majesty of art,

* C'est qu'être sensible est une chose, et sentir est une autre. L'une est une affaire d'âme, l'autre une affaire de jugement. Diderot, VIII., 415. Diderot has presented an admirable discussion of the whole subject. *Paradoxe sur le Comédien, Œuvres Complètes,* VIII., 361–423.

† Not without significance does the word *inspiration* mean an "indrawing of the breath."

‡ Ben Jonson, I believe, but am unable at the moment to lay my hand upon the passage.

Set high in spirit with the precious taste
Of sweet philosophy, and, which is most,
Crown'd with the rich traditions of a soul
That hates to have her dignity prophaned
With any relish of an earthly thought,
Oh! then, how proud a presence doth she bear.

Great poetry is full of great and solid thought; this is an element of its power and of its grandeur that we must not altogether overlook, in spite of those practitioners of the art who by their practice maintain that a phrase fully justifies its existence if it only scan indifferently well, even if it be devoid of any intellectual content whatever. "My purpose in writing poetry," said Wordsworth, "was to make people see that which without the poet's aid they would have failed to see; to teach them to see, to think, and to feel." Every great achievement of the human mind, in the last analysis, we may be forced to admit, is but an exhibition of power, an expression of vital force, as we have recognized in the case of artistic repose, but in a poem the result is apparently so fragile, and oftentimes the finish of it a thing of such slight and dainty grace, that, seeing only the ease with which it is achieved, we almost forget the strength that lies behind. Yet the inevitableness and the accuracy of that expression are due to the strength of the poet's endowment. It takes just as steady a hand and as sound nerves to make a salmon-fly alight with unerring accuracy ninety feet away, as by the woodman's art to bring the monarch of the forest crashing to his doom. It is not necessary to institute a comparison between the two kinds of skill; both demand judgment and facility gained by effort and long practice. Strength is required to spin gossamer

threads of gold as well as to forge iron anchors for the sea.

The power of sustained thought the poet must have, only in his case we are in the habit of calling it meditation. The power of profound reflection and sustained poetic meditation is a necessary part of the poetic equipment, whatever those may say to the contrary who believe in the "slap-dash" method of poetic creation, where form is despised and chaos is welcomed again, if only the clouds of inchoate energy whirl with sufficient fury.

Although the highest heaven of intellectual delight be the celestial circle of most unbounded horizon, yet is the number of those permitted to partake of its transport limited to few. To the circle of lesser diameter, yielding merely the interests and pleasures of the world and of the hour,—

> The heaven which has the smallest circle,—

the doors of entrance are innumerable. We are permitted to enter the widest circle of celestial joy only after converse with great minds, and after passionate allegiance to those few who, among the countless millions of mankind, have been able to divest themselves of this muddy vesture of decay,—have been able to attain to the heights of clear thought and serene emotion. These are the masters of poesy, souls that have burst through the limitations of sense and individual personality, and have risen strong and transparent as a sun-pierced fountain; whose thought has the intensity of passion, whose power of feeling is so sure and so discriminating that it has led them to close sympathy with human suffering and with human joy.

The poetic temperament, as Emerson, himself a poet, clearly saw, as Plato, a supreme poet, saw,—the poetic temperament, as every one feels at times, however loath he may be to make the admission, is liable to peculiar failings, and, except in the rare instances of the great masters of the art whose endowment is highest in rank, poetic sensibility is almost as often an element of weakness as of strength. The estimate formed by the "man of the street" is of value in confirming the judgment of the seers, of the *illuminati,* and if it be well-nigh universal, is of even greater value than that of the professed critic, whatever his acuteness may be in the recognition of technical excellence or defect. We glean the verdict of wisdom from the judgment of the uninstructed, just as one might look into a well for Truth and see a heavenly star reflected there, hidden by the very light of day in the sky above our heads. The element of weakness in poetic sensibility lies not in the power of feeling, but in the impressionability of the poet. The word "emotional," as applied to a person, has come in ordinary speech to mean one not necessarily endowed with strong emotion, but having emotions easily aroused. Persons of this order possess sensibility; it is apt to be sensitiveness as well. Their emotions are easily stirred; it does not at all follow that they possess strength of feeling in an endowment of exceptional degree.

In reading the poets—all except those of the first order—we shall not the less enjoy the manifestation of their power by permitting ourselves to admit that they are not always in the same measure wise and strong. The very intensity of their nature concentrates their life into short periods by burning up their vitality, as it were,

in flashes of inspiration, and we certainly are the gainers from their ability to do exactly this thing. But they themselves may feel the reaction which naturally comes after great effort, and may experience that lassitude which is apt to follow any concentrated and unusual draft upon vital energy. The intense and artistic temperament is only a small part, however, of the poetic endowment.

A great poet is not merely a wit,—in the old meaning of the word,—but he possesses in its most complete manifestation the "calm and philosophic mind." Who can doubt that Emerson was right when he said that in looking through Chalmers's collection of five centuries of English poets, we are forced to admit that "These are wits, more than poets, though there have been poets among them." Let us enjoy what the singer can give, uttered from mere lightness of heart, even if it be but a coruscation of alleged fancy, and have not any deep message at all. But it is not necessary to stultify ourselves in so doing. We shall not be detracting from whatever satisfaction is to be derived from their companionship by justly appreciating their creations, by responding to their mood, and by withholding the name of poet from all but a few. "The difference between genuine poetry," said Matthew Arnold, "and the poetry of Dryden, Pope, and all their school, is briefly this: Their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits; genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul."

In assisting to a correct determination of what the poet brings to his age and to mankind, we shall find this passage from Emerson of no slight interest. It is from

the essay on *Prudence*. "There are," he tells us, "all degrees of proficiency in knowledge of the world. It is sufficient to our purpose to indicate three. One class live to the utility of the symbol, esteeming health and wealth a final good. Another class live above this mark to the beauty of the symbol, as the poet and artist, and the naturalist and man of science. A third class live above the beauty of the symbol to the beauty of the thing signified; these are wise men. The first class have common sense; the second, taste; the third, spiritual perception. Once in a long time, a man traverses the whole scale, and sees and enjoys the symbol solidly; then also has a clear eye for its beauty; and lastly, whilst he pitches his tent on this sacred volcanic isle of nature, does not offer to build houses and barns thereon, reverencing the splendour of the God which he sees bursting through each chink and cranny."

X

Matthew Arnold it may be was right in refusing the name of poet to all except those who have the power to give us "a criticism of life"; to all save those who have the genius which permits them to "see clear and think straight" about it, and to distinguish in the ordinary interests and occupations of life those things which are worth while, and those which are not vital to man's happiness and intellectual growth. Arnold doubtless brought out in its full strength the force of his definition of poetry, in a similar manner to that in which he gave added emphasis and meaning, often iterated and reinforced, to Swift's casual words about "sweetness

and light." It is difficult to imagine any one as using them with more telling effect than he has done, yet this passage from the *Phædrus* contains the full significance of Arnold's phrase, suggested if not quite so concisely expressed, that poetry is a "criticism of life." It is pleasant to feel that Arnold built upon Plato, and that he did so gives added weight and value to his demonstration. The meeting of three such minds as those of Plato, Swift, and Arnold means an intellectual association, to say the least, of extraordinary range and diversity.*

Socrates: "But he who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much which is not serious, and that neither poetry nor prose, spoken or written, are of any great value if, like the compositions of the rhapsodes, they are recited merely to persuade, and not with any view to criticism or instruction; and who thinks that even the best of them are but reminders to knowledge, and that only in principles of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated orally and written in the soul (which is the true way of writing), is there clearness and perfection and seriousness, * * * this is the right sort of man, and you and I, Phædrus, would pray that we may become like them."

How few of the poets, so called, succeed in giving us, or desire first of all to give us, "principles of goodness written in the soul"! Their meditations are graceful, exquisite, dainty; perhaps full of fancy, playfulness, richness of imagery, splendour of ornament, subtlety and

*The Greek word which Jowett renders "criticism" is ἀνάκρισις, the ordinary meaning of which is "close examination" (implying also "judgment," "discernment," and "judgment and discernment based upon close examination"); an import of almost precisely the same significance as "criticism" in Arnold's use of the word.

fluency of expression. It may be that they possess accuracy and variety of rhyme,—harmony, melody, rhythm; that they are at times adorned with the pearls of simplicity, the rubies of passion, pathos, and tenderness, the precious diamonds of imagination. After long periods of darkness, our vision is dazed, it may be, by the lightning flash of tragic powers, often leaving us the darker when it is past. Or we are surrounded by bewildering enchantments, like pale arctic gleams, of the mysterious, the unreal, and the supernatural, by the intoxicating, all-promising, sunrise blush of love, the pensive, idealizing, pervasive moonlight of reverie and contemplation, and—too often, alas! among those laying claim to the possession of poetic gifts—by the "moonshine" of sentimentality. But how rarely is the priest of Poesy first of all, whether in outward or in inward vision, a lover of the beautiful as well as an artist; one who is not merely "a wingëd and holy thing," but who possesses also, in addition to this special and technical equipment, a mind firm, sane, and well-poised! Some few there have been,—Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth. It was the last of these who said: "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." The poet is the true idealist. His oft-repeated message is, "Your plans may often fail; you need never fail." Emerson quotes Bacon's definition of poetry, based on that of Aristotle, and as we might expect, it penetrates to the very root of the matter: "Poetry, not finding the actual world exactly conformed to its idea of good and fair, seeks to accommodate the shows of things to the desires of the mind, and to create an ideal world better than the world of experience." And elsewhere he says: "The young man reveres men of

genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is. They receive of the soul as he also receives, but they more."

The poet who is also the seer gives us not merely forms of beauty to caress the eye, but penetrating the disguise of appearance, he reveals the luminous reality of truth enwrapped in the veil of beauty. "Sight is the keenest of the bodily senses," said Plato, "though not by that is Wisdom seen; her loveliness would have been transporting if there had been a visible image of her, and the same is true of the loveliness of other ideas as well." "The reason of [the soul's] great desire to behold the plain of truth is that the food which is suited to the highest part of the soul comes out of that meadow; and the wing on which the soul soars is nourished by this." "The natural efficacy of a wing is to lift up heavy substances, and bear them aloft to those upper regions which are inhabited by the race of the gods." "Now of the heaven which is above the heavens no earthly poet has ever sung or will sing worthily. * * * And the divine intelligence, feeding upon mind and pure knowledge, the proper food of every soul, rejoices at beholding reality, and once more, gazing upon truth, is replenished and made glad."

Calmness of mind Plato regarded as the most divine thing of life. "There is no joy but calm" to him was not merely a telling phrase, demanded by the exigencies of poetry, through the medium of words which are aglow with enthusiasm, but was a profound conviction of the heart. By nature he could not withhold his sympathy from the poetic temperament, which is peculiarly liable to agitation.

Plato's opinion is of the first importance in any investigation as to the nature of that particular form of genius which finds expression in verse, because, although he wrote in prose, he was possessed of a poetic mind of finest sensibility, and was at the same time one of the wisest of philosophers. He was an idealist in a double sense: his world was one of ideas more real and more vital to him than what our age is in the habit of calling facts, and he was also an idealist in that he believed in perfectibility, in ideal perfection, and believed in unremitting effort to attain perfection. He enforced his meaning by lively imagery; he possessed the power of accurate intuition; he perceived the reflection of opinion in the still waters of truth, and gave us that reflection more perfect than the object itself, as one may see in the pool beneath his feet a star of greater magnitude than shines in the sky above his head. He gives us this spiritual perception of the external object, as did Swedenborg according to his light, robbed of the limitations of human circumstance and imperfection, and, as it were, transfigured by his genius into the immortal beauty of the ideal and of the idea. Emerson said that when reading Plato, and when under his spell, the Socratic dialogues seemed the only thing in the world worth reading. "I am a great lover of these processes of division and generalization," said Socrates; "they help me to speak and think." "What motive has a man to live," said Phædrus, "if not for the pleasures of discourse?" While the Socratic endowment of trenchant mother-wit was unrivalled, yet one is convinced that the poetic development of these multitudinous images and ideas was due also to the skill of the scholar who has

recorded them, to his own poetic spirit as well as to his strongly logical and philosophic mind.

We shall apprehend what Plato means by "philosopher," in considering that pursuit or occupation of mind which he contrasts with Philosophy. To Socrates the philosophic life is the antithesis of a "life of ambition." He thought that to a rational being self-advancement could not in any real sense be the greatest good, but that the divinest thing in life was the power of discerning truth; and that it involved and constituted a life of meditation and of right reason, and of passionate love for them and devotion to them. In praise of the "calm and philosophic mind," he rises to sublime heights of eloquence, to poetic heights of eloquence.

In considering the attitude toward poetry of Plato on the one hand and of Aristotle on the other we are confronted by the incongruous circumstance of declared opposition to the poets in one who was himself a poet, and of "apology" for poetry,—in the old meaning of the word, an exposition and defence of poetry,—in one who was the great high priest of the scientific and inductive manner and spirit of investigation. Aristotle recognized the need of poetic culture, and in the *Poetics* concisely stated the benefit to the spectator of tragic acting, and to the reader of tragic poetry, with which he is chiefly concerned, to be the chastening of the emotions by pity and by fear, effected through a noble representation on the stage of scenes arousing those emotions. The formula of expression used to convey this conception being that the emotions were "purged" by being thus aroused in beholding the counterfeit presentment of pity and of fear.

It is interesting to compare Aristotle's view with that

of the great investigator of our time into the laws of the material universe, a man with faculties of generalization as powerful, it seems to us of this age, as were those of Aristotle himself,—of generalization as vital to the progress of civilization, but whose personality and character were of a quite different type. The name of Darwin makes one think rather of the sweet and humane simplicity of Socrates, whose personal character is so open to our familiar acquaintance in the dialogues of Plato, than of the abstract and impersonal intellectuality suggested by that of Aristotle. Aristotle seems in comparison with Plato as a sort of glorified Herbert Spencer, only more so,—of greater voltage, if one may use the phrase,—and possessing the wisdom which comes from deeper understanding. Spencer, with his dry dialectic, could never conquer the intellectual devotion of mankind and hold it as Aristotle undoubtedly did in undisputed empire for a thousand years.

Darwin tells us in the autobiographic sketch published at the beginning of his *Life and Letters,* that as a boy he was extremely fond of reading poetry, especially Shakespeare. Later in life, and as he became engrossed in scientific work, he says: "My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive." "The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature."

It is to be noted that he uses the word "atrophy," thus

employing a technical term of pathology, to describe the condition of his mind. "But why this" [i.e., great powers of generalization] "should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive." "Were I to begin life over again," he says, "I should make it a point to read a certain amount of poetry daily, as necessary and vital to the complete development of the mental and moral powers."

XI

PLATO briefly touches the theme of *Poetry* in several dialogues; in the *Republic,* the *Banquet, Phædrus,* and *Ion.* So far as our present inquiry is concerned, that, namely, into the interpretation of the Poetic Genius and the *Theory of Poetry,* the *ars theoretica* as applied to poetry,—the art, that is, of speculation and exposition,—we shall find the most direct assistance, though that is limited, in the *Phædrus.**

To understand Plato aright, we must never lose from mind a wise caution given by Jowett, that Plato is not a "poet disguised as a philosopher"; his philosophic speculations are not merely the creation of the poetic imagination, true only in so far as consistent with the dramatic character of Socrates. What Plato means by "philosopher," and what Matthew Arnold would signify by "poet," the "critic of life," one who helps us in discerning how to live, and who renders assistance by his clearer

* To examine into the theory of the subject, or to form a theory, is not to *theorize;* the verb has an element of ignoble significance, but the word "theory," as here used, retains, uncontaminated and undegraded, the original meaning of the verb θεωρεῖν, to look at, to view.

vision,—these are one and the same. And when Arnold describes one sort of poet as—

> Pinnacled dim in the intense inane,

not

> Standing on earth [but] rapt above the sky,

whose Pegasus, although he does not say it,

> Kicks at earth with a disdainful heel,
> And beats at heaven gates with his bright steel,

we feel that he is referring to the same sort of temperament that Plato has in mind when he speaks of the poet as a "wingëd and holy thing" whom he would politely but firmly exclude from his ideal republic. But Plato's philosopher is a poet, as Arnold understood the word; surely if ever there lived a "critic of life," it was Plato, one whose vision as to what made life most rich was unconfused,—one who saw clear and thought straight—

> On man, on nature, and on human life.

Plato is not a "poet disguised as a philosopher"; as well speak of the rainbow disguised as the sun, as of the poetic temperament of this master masquerading beneath a calm and philosophic mind. But it is through the delicacy and fineness of illustration and adaptation by which the idea is presented to us and made beautiful and irresistible, and which only a great poet could command, that we feel the superhuman strength and majesty, the brilliancy and clearness of that philosophic mind and heart, which vivify and irradiate all.

The dialogue of the *Republic* is concerned with the search after justice and the construction of the ideal

state. This ideal state shall be governed by philosophers, who of all men are most purged from selfishness, and are the most intense lovers of justice, truth, beauty, perfection. In the creation of his ideal Republic, the question of education had to be carefully considered and matured. Involved in this theme arose the discussion of the influence of Homer in the training of youth, and the conclusion was finally arrived at that the poets, meaning thereby chiefly the great epic and didactic poets, Homer and Hesiod, did more harm than good; that poets were "wingëd and holy things," but that when they came to the gates of the ideal city they should be greeted with all courtesy and honour, but firmly refused admission.

"No one can duly appreciate the dialogues of Plato," says Jowett, in one of his luminous Introductions to the dialogues, "especially the *Phædrus,* the *Banquet,* and portions of the *Republic,* who has not a sympathy with mysticism. By mysticism we mean, not the extravagance of an erring fancy, but the concentration of vision in feeling, the enthusiastic love of the good, the true, the one, the sense of the infinity of knowledge and the marvel of the human faculties."

Mr. R. W. Livingstone, in his recent book on the *Greek Genius,* has stated with admirable directness Plato's conception of love, a concise *résumé* of one phase of this master's teaching, tainted by doctrines which in a certain totally unexpected way are not vitally Greek at all, but are premonitory of Christian thought. Let us see what he has to say about this passion which so upsets nearly every man's preconceived ideas of the created universe, this ruthless disturber of gods and men: "That

potent and surprising emotion to which all humanity is liable [Plato] endeavoured to connect with mystic experiences in a former life, when the unborn human souls drove across heaven in the train of Zeus and the other gods. There they caught a passing glimpse of the great Ideas, of essential beauty, essential justice, essential temperance, essential knowledge, and then, falling to the earth, were imprisoned in bodies and born as men. And so when a man meets beauty in the world, his soul, which is languishing in its prison-house, revives, and is fed and refreshed, and remembers once more the vision of ideal beauty which it saw before birth: this is love. Love, therefore, is the intermediary between God and man, the desire of the beautiful which is also the good, an earnest of the divine excellence which resides in heaven, simple and unalloyed." *

Plato gives the opinion of his master upon the poets, the "wingëd and holy things." Socrates had expressed his dissatisfaction with them, conceding to them faculties only of the sixth order of importance, and banishing them from his Republic, in a similar mood to that in which a poet-philosopher of to-day—such a poet-philosopher as Montaigne, or Wordsworth, or Emerson—might object to a too exclusive occupation with the popular novel. This form of literature, the ephemeral epic of our day, is almost universally read now as Homer was in theirs, though we, in our diversified interest in many novels, in the latest novel, scatter our faculties, "lay waste our powers," whereas the Greeks ever recurred to Homer as a fountain of wisdom and refreshment. In the satisfying of our intellectual needs in the field of

* *The Greek Genius and its Meaning to Us*, R. W. Livingstone, p. 185.

fiction it may be said that we are sustained by an infinity of gossamer threads, cumulatively strong while their hold was a twisted rope; in times of stress and emergency, perhaps, to say the least, as safe a hold for the sheet-anchor of their craft. Our method requires greater skill, and we are fascinated by the intricacies of the game, by the very complexity of the intellectual interest, and there is not the slightest danger of our going back to old-fashioned methods, far too simple for a sophisticated race and generation.

Nor would Plato, despite his utterance here and there to that effect, banish the poets. In his heart he valued them aright; he says of them, in the *Lysis,* "They are to us, in a manner, the fathers and authors of wisdom." His attitude in the *Republic* is that of disapproval of those qualities wherein the poets failed of complete excellence, and his unqualified disapproval is a merited rebuke to their failings, under the guise of allegory,— under the guise of that which to the Greek mind was a harmless and perfectly apparent exaggeration. It is only one among innumerable instances of the Socratic irony. The poems of Homer were to the Greeks that which most nearly corresponds to the Bible in a Christian world, or to what the Bible, or *Paradise Lost,* was to our Puritan ancestors. Everybody with any claim to civilized taste read him, and quoted him on all occasions. Every incident of life out of the common was illuminated by associations with the Homeric story, and the Homeric fable cast its glamour over the commonest things. Homer contained the best known stories of their gods; some of them perhaps not particularly characterized by propriety. To Plato these were unworthy, and

far too much tainted with human imperfection to be the nourishing food of the imagination. Willingly he would have banished such fables, exactly as the philosopher of a certain type would to-day, if he could, prohibit most of our newspapers and much of our current literature; would, if he were able, half of the time exclude the very blood from our veins.

But to imagine for a moment that an ideal state could long exist without poetic meditation and aspiration would have been to his mind abhorrent and absurd. He himself was a poet in all but verse; the poetic imagery of the Tenth Book of the *Republic,* for instance, of that very book containing the discussion of the banishment of the poets,—rises to poetic heights. Only a poet could have conceived the vision of Er, and the same may be said of many passages in the other dialogues—for instance, of the humourous origin of the sexes, given by Aristophanes in the *Banquet,* and of the parable of the immortality of the soul, in the *Phædrus.* His deepest lessons were enforced by the aid of vigourous poetic imagination, and clothed in a wealth of poetic imagery, two of the supreme and distinguishing characteristics of the poetic genius.

Nowhere more fully are the mysterious depth and suggestiveness of the Socratic mind revealed than in the *Banquet* and *Phædrus.* When the inward eye, dwelling upon that of which it has caught a tantalizing glimpse, penetrates their quiet and profound depths, suggested rather than revealed, a spell falls upon the mind, of silence, and of profound and exquisite satisfaction.

The subjects treated in the *Phædrus* are various aspects of the art of Rhetoric, and, arising out of the

discussion of this theme, the inspiration of beauty and of knowledge, wherein incidentally is given, glancingly but with wisdom, Plato's view of poetic inspiration. "Poetic inspiration," says Socrates, "is a kind of 'madness,' but this is not 'simply an evil.'" "There are two kinds of madness," he says; "one produced by human infirmity, and the other by a divine release from the ordinary ways of men." Of this latter sort, he proceeds to maintain, there are four kinds by which men may profit, "the special gift of heaven, and the source of the chiefest blessings among men. For prophecy is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi, and the priestess at Dodona, when out of their senses, have conferred great benefits upon Hellas, both in public and private life; and when in their senses, few or none." "Again, when plagues and mightiest woes have bred in a race, owing to some ancient wrath, there madness enters with holy prayers and rites, and by inspired utterances finds a way of deliverance for those who are in need." "There is also a third kind of madness, of those who are possessed by the Muses; which enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and other numbers; with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity." "The fourth and last kind of madness [is that] which is imputed to him who, when he sees the beauty of earth, is transported with the recollection of the true beauty [which he has seen when a soul preceding his mortal life]; he would like to fly away, but he cannot, he is like a bird fluttering and looking upward and careless of the world below; and he is therefore esteemed mad." "The first [is] the inspiration of Apollo, the second that of

Dionysus, the third that of the Muses, the fourth that of Aphrodite and Eros."

In this fourth class, philosopher and lover, having a mystical identity, are treated as synonymous; in one of them the mind, in the other the emotions and senses, being swayed by desire. Both long with passionate eagerness for beauty and perfection; he, who loves nobly, craving in his beloved satisfaction of the desire for perfection, that perfection of body which delights and caresses the eye of the body, and that more divine perfection of intelligence and of right reason which in the Christian world is described as character, and the sight of which by the clear-seeing eye of the mind creates a spiritual transport of deep and penetrating satisfaction.

Every one is aware that the passion of love arises from superabundance of life and energy. By "falling in love," as by being kicked up-stairs, one rises to a higher plane. The matter of first importance is not by what means he there attains, whether through the instrumentality of the senses, or by quickened altruism, —the essential thing is that he thereby wins to a higher and to a nobler estate. It is the blossoming of man's finest and most unselfish instincts, filling the soul with beauty and with radiance, which are revealed in the face, in grace of manner, in courtesy, and in conduct.

> "For indeed I knew [said Arthur]
> Of no more subtle master under heaven
> Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
> Not only to keep down the base in man,
> But teach high thought, and amiable words
> And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
> And love of truth, and all that makes a man."

"Love is a poet," said Agathon, most pertinently to our inquiry, "and the source of poetry in others. * * * At the touch of him every one becomes a poet, even though he had no music in him before." When the turn of Socrates came to speak upon this theme, he took the others to task for lavish and indiscriminate praise of Love, yet I doubt if in his heart he would really have questioned that part of Agathon's speech. Emerson deemed it quite true, and he himself had a strong dash of "Uncle Socrates" about him (and used this phrase in speaking of him). Could we ask a better demonstration of the excellence of poetry in Plato's view than that it springs naturally and instinctively from man's best and most unselfish state?

No matter how "contrāry" and crabbed the lover may have been in ordinary and normal health, in this season of abnormal health, of concentrated and sublimated energy, contentment exhales from him like perfume from the rugged hawthorn bush in bloom, so that others are bewitched by its mere presence. "All mankind love a lover," said Emerson. "The madness of love," said Socrates, "is the greatest of heaven's blessings"; and the proof of the assertion was so vital and so immensely important to his mind that it involved the demonstration of the immortality of the soul.

"[The soul's] form is a theme of divine and large discourse; the tongue of man may, however, speak of this briefly in a figure"; and here follows the allegory of the pair of wingéd horses and the charioteer of the *Phædrus,* in which for the first time in the recorded history of intellectual science the threefold nature of the intellect is shown,—Will, Reason, and Emotion.

In the art of love, Socrates proclaimed himself an adept. It was a bit of his humour that he disclaimed knowledge of everything else. He says to Hippothales in the *Lysis:* "Simple and foolish as I am, the gods have given me the power of understanding this sort of affections"; and underneath his half-jesting speech is hidden a deeper philosophic meaning.

We should only confuse our present inquiry in regard to Poetry if we attempted to dispose of the other investigation in a cursory and hasty manner; but they are involved, to a certain extent, one in the other, and to arrive at Plato's view of poetry it is necessary to be familiar with what he says on this in the *Banquet* and elsewhere.

The third class of Plato's division, as given in the *Phædrus,* includes the epic poets, and is in the main a criticism of Homer. His fourth class, which includes lover and philosopher, embraces those whom we are accustomed to consider as poets rather than as "philosophers" in the modern acceptation of the word.

In elaboration of the idea of poetic inspiration, of the divine madness of the poetic gift, of the poetic genius, we find a passage in the *Apology* which is of aid. "Any person in the crowd," said Socrates, "is a better interpreter of his own powers than the poet himself." "Will you believe me?" he said, again in jesting humour referring to the poets: "I am almost ashamed to confess the truth, but I must say that there is hardly a person who would not have talked better about poetry than they did themselves. Then I knew without going further that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like diviners or sooth-

sayers, who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them."

This last touch would seem again to be a coruscation of Socratic wit. In the *Ion,* Socrates, in delicious irony, asks the rhapsodist whether he would prefer to be thought dishonest or inspired. "But if, as I believe, you have no art," said Socrates, "but speak all these beautiful words about Homer unconsciously under his inspiring influence, then I acquit you of dishonesty, and shall only say that you are inspired. Which do you prefer to be thought, dishonest or inspired?"

Ion: "There is a great difference, Socrates, between them; and inspiration is the far nobler alternative."

Socrates: "Then, Ion, I shall assume the nobler alternative, and attribute to you, in your praises of Homer, inspiration and not art."

Turning again to the *Phædrus,* we see the pitfalls that surround the poet. "But he who, having no touch of the Muses' madness in his soul, comes to the door, and thinks he will get into the temple by the help of art,—he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man is nowhere at all when he enters into rivalry with the madman."

The idea of the inspiration of the Poetic Genius, of the divine frenzy or madness that seizes the poet in the contemplation of beauty and in poetic creation, is expressed most admirably and most beautifully in words issuing from the mouth of Socrates in the dialogue of *Ion.** It will be well for us to reflect upon the penetrative insight of the greatest American "philosopher" and

* Whether or not the *Ion* be from the hand of Plato is immaterial to our inquiry.

seer in bidding us note that Plato himself, poet though he be, is never rapt and transported beyond the limits of wise and philosophic calm. Like Milton and Emerson, his character had a solidity and poise beyond possibility of disquiet and agitation, complete immunity from which was the inevitable prerequisite for the highest nobility of intelligence, or art, or character, in Grecian civilization at the zenith of its brief but splendidly luminous course.

Before reading the quotation from the *Ion,* let us listen to great Aristotle, who expresses himself with curious identity of thought: "Poetry is the province either of a man who is clever or of one who is in an enthusiasm akin to madness."* Both Plato and Aristotle were in this agreed, that the faculties of the poet transcend those of ordinary men. Let us now listen to the former:

Socrates:† "Tynnichus, the Chalcidian, wrote nothing that any one would care to remember, but the famous poem which is in every one's mouth, one of the finest poems ever written, and truly an invention of the Muses, as he himself says. For in this way the god would seem to indicate to us that these beautiful poems *are not the work of man, but divine, and the work of God; and that the poets are only the interpreters of the gods by whom they are severally possessed.* Was not this the lesson which the god intended to teach, when, by the mouth of the worst of poets, he sang the best of songs? Am I not right, Ion?"

Ion: "Yes, indeed, Socrates, I feel that you are; for

* *Poetics,* IV. and XVII., 3.

† Jowett's translation of Plato's *Dialogues,* except a portion of the prayer of Socrates, almost at the end, which is from an earlier translation, also by Jowett, in the *Edinburgh Review,* April, 1848.

your words touch my soul, and I am persuaded somehow that *good poets are the inspired interpreters of the gods.*"

In conclusion, it would seem that the real belief of Plato in regard to Poetry is indicated in the following extract from the *Phædrus:*

"Neither poetry nor prose, spoken or written, are of any great value, if like the compositions of the rhapsodes they are only recited in order to be believed, and not with any view to criticism or instruction." * * * "And now the play is played out," said Socrates. * * * "Go and tell Lysias that to the fountain and school of the Nymphs we went down, and were bidden by them to convey a message to him and to other composers of speeches,—to Homer and other writers of poems, whether set to music or not; and to Solon and others who have composed writings which they term laws,—to all of them we are to say that if their compositions are based on knowledge of the truth, and they can defend or prove them, when they are put to the test of spoken arguments, which leave their writings poor in comparison of them, then they are not only poets, orators, legislators, but worthy of a higher name."

Phædrus: "What name is that?"

Socrates: "Wise, I may not call them, for that is a great name which belongs to God alone,—lovers of wisdom or philosophers is their modest and befitting title."

* * * *

Phædrus: "Now, as the heat is abated, let us depart."

Socrates: "Should we not offer up a prayer first of all to the local deities?"

Phædrus: "By all means."

Socrates: "Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, grant that I may become beautiful within, and that whatever of external good I possess may be friendly to my internal purity: let me account the wise man rich; and of wealth let me have only so much as a prudent man can bear or employ. Anything more? That prayer, I think, is enough for me."

Phædrus: "Ask the same for me, for friends should have all things in common."

Socrates: "Let us go."

APPENDIX

THE BUST OF MILTON

The portrait of Milton at the beginning of this volume is from the bust in clay, now in the Master's Lodge, Christ's College, Cambridge, England. It is believed to have been taken from life, and has every appearance of having been the portrait of a living man. We know that it was accepted as a likeness of Milton by those who were so nearly his own contemporaries that their evidence is of the greatest value.

Various engravings, at one time and another, have been made from this bust; the first of them was by George Vertue, in 1738, from a drawing by Jonathan Richardson,—"badly designed by Mr. Richardson," Hollis assures us in the passage about to be quoted.

In the memorial volume published at the time of the Milton Tercentenary by Christ's College, Cambridge, entitled: *The Portraits, Prints and Writings of John Milton,* edited by Dr. Williamson, there is printed (p. 29), a letter dated 13 Nov. 1875, from W. Aldis Wright, LL.D., Vice-Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, addressed to the Master of Christ's College, of the same university, in which he calls the latter's attention to a Life of Thomas Hollis (4to, London, 1870). In this book there was reproduced a wretched engraving by Cipriani of the Milton bust, which was said to be "From a bust in plaister modelled from the life, now in the possession of Thomas Hollis." The engraving is dated 1760. Dr. Wright quotes from this book (Vol. II., p. 513):

"Mr. Hollis, in a paper dated July 30, 1757, says, 'For an original model in clay of the head of Milton, £9, 12 s., which I intended to have purchased myself, had it not been knocked down to Mr. Reynolds by a mistake of Mr. Ford the auctioneer.'

"Note, about two years before Mr. Vertue died, he told me that he had been possessed of this head many years; and that he believed it was done by one Pierce, a sculptor of good reputation in those times, the same who made the bust in marble of Sir Christopher Wren, which is in the Bodleian Library. My own impression is that it was modelled by Abraham Simon; and that afterwards a seal was engraved after it, in profile, by his brother Thomas Simon, a proof impression of which is now in the hands of Mr. Yeo, engraver in Covent Garden. This head was badly designed by Mr. Richardson, and then engraved by Mr. Vertue, and prefixed to Milton's prose-works, in quarto, printed for A. Millar 1753 (Baron's edition) [First edition, 1638]. The bust probably was executed soon after Milton had written his 'Defensio pro populo Anglicano.' Mr. Reynolds obligingly parted with this bust to Mr. Hollis for twelve guineas."

Dr. Wright adds: "Vertue, whose seal is mentioned, was the engraver who died in 1756. Who Mr. Reynolds may have been I can only conjecture. Perhaps Sir Joshua."

It would seem as if the deliberate statement of Vertue, who had owned the bust,—who was an engraver and who had himself made the engraving from it of the head of the poet which appears in Milton's Prose Works, 1738,—should be accepted as conclusive, particularly as the Abraham Simon to whom Hollis refers was a medallist and is not credited, so far as appears in the *Dictionary of National Biography,* with the execution of works of sculpture in the round.

In Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting* (Vol. II., page 315), we find this account of Edward Pierce, the younger: "He made the statues of Sir Thomas Gresham, of Edward III., at the Royal Exchange, and of Sir William Walworth at Fish-monger's Hall; a marble bust of Thomas Evans, master of, and a great benefactor to, the company of Painters in 1687: the bust is in their hall: a model of the head of Milton, which Vertue had, the bust of Sir

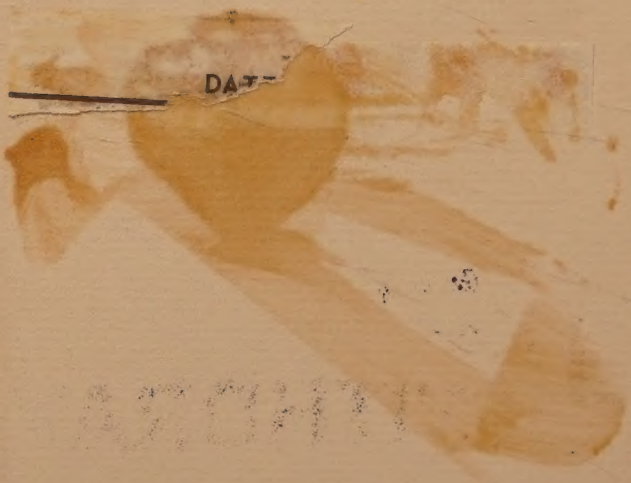
Christopher Wren in the picture-gallery at Oxford, and a bust of Cromwell sold at an auction in 1714."

It is to be borne in mind that Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting* was based upon Vertue's own manuscript, as is stated upon the title-page: "Anecdotes of Painting in England; with some Account of the Principal Artists, etc., collected by the late Mr. George Vertue, digested and published from his original MSS. by the Honourable Horace Walpole." In the Dedication to the Baroness Dowager Hervey, in the same book, Walpole pleasantly remarks: "I am rather an editor than an author, yet having little purpose of appearing again in the latter character, I am forced to pay my debts to your Ladyship with Mr. Vertue's coin. If his industry has amassed anything that can amuse one or two of your idle hours * * * I shall think his life was well employed."

Walpole in his *Preface* tells us that he was obliged to rewrite the greater portion of the *Anecdotes,* but the evidence in regard to the Milton bust is explicit and was in all probability recorded by Vertue himself. Walpole's testimony as to the care with which Vertue conducted his researches and as to his absolute veracity is very convincing: "One satisfaction the reader will have in the integrity of Mr. Vertue; it exceeded his industry which is saying much. No man living, so bigoted to a vocation, was ever so incapable of falsehood. He did not deal even in hypothesis, scarce in conjecture."

In all probability the bust was executed long before *Paradise Lost* was composed, and when Milton was about forty-four or forty-five years of age. Of all the portraits of Milton it presents the most convincing appearance of vitality and of intellectual concentration. Thus, in the first year of his blindness and in the full vigour of middle age, the poet must have looked.

We are fortunate indeed to have a reproduction of this likeness, interpreted by the greatest living master of wood-engraving, Mr. Timothy Cole. The face is rendered with the utmost skill and with a sympathetic insight such as we might expect of one who is himself a poet.



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